

**THE ART OF STRATEGIC BALANCE:
RECONCILING GLOBAL, DOMESTIC, AND THEATER
IMPERATIVES**

BY
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Abstract

This study attempts to determine what is required of senior military and political leaders to reconcile differences and reduce tensions among global, domestic, and theater imperatives by examining the evidence from Operation Torch, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War. The most significant contributing factors that promoted or inhibited the fusion in each case study are determined, analyzed, and synthesized to provide implications for the development and selection of future strategists. Although it may appear obvious, this study found that people, situations, and ideas matter. Leaders who possessed an above-average intellect, the confidence to transcend their own sphere of control and influence, an impartial and informed military perspective, and the ability to stay focused on the essentials excelled in formulating balanced strategy. The evidence also suggests that a flawed theater-military strategy is likely to prevent the attainment of global and domestic objectives; and, once set in motion, may become difficult or impossible to rectify.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Any profession experiences a tension between its inherent professional aspirations and the extraneous politics in which it may become involved. The tension between the two, consequently, can never be removed; it can only be ordered so as to make it more or less durable.

Samuel P. Huntington, 1957

General Problem and Significance

Senior political and military leaders, especially during times of peace, become very comfortable in their own spheres of control and influence; but their outlooks may fail to transcend their own domains. Understandably, theater commanders tend to focus on their own military area of operations, while political leaders concern themselves with global and domestic imperatives. However, once politicians decide to utilize military means to achieve political ends, understanding one domain is necessary but not sufficient to formulate a balanced strategy.

In this context, balanced does not necessarily mean having the same weight or distribution because one domain may have a higher priority in a given situation. Instead, balance indicates a well-proportioned blend of considerations. It is difficult enough to solve the dynamics of one domain; however, when all three domains are combined in the context of war, the differences among them become even more pronounced and difficult to reconcile. Like Carl von Clausewitz's concept of friction, this problem is inevitable but must be resolved. Limited resources can make the problem worse; but even during times of plenty, senior political and military leaders are required to set priorities, determine objectives, and develop a strategy that balances all three domains. This argument may appear obvious; but senior political and military leaders, both past and present, have struggled with the concept of balance. Their behavior raises the question:

When attempting to formulate a balanced strategy, what is required of senior military and political leaders to reconcile differences and reduce tensions among global, domestic, and theater-military domains? The purpose of this study is to answer that question. Because war is episodic, most leaders get only one chance to formulate a balanced strategy. As Michael Howard noted, “It is as if a surgeon had to practice throughout his life on dummies for one real operation; or a professional swimmer had to spend his life practicing on dry land for an Olympic championship on which the future of his nation depended.”¹

The following brief synopsis of the September 1950 decision to revise the strategic goal during the Korean War illustrates what can happen when one domain is not properly balanced with the other two. From a global standpoint, President Harry S. Truman had to balance containing communism in Korea with maintaining a credible deterrent posture in Europe and a credible defense if deterrence failed.² From a domestic perspective, Truman worried that he and the Democratic Party would continue to be perceived by Congress and the American public as soft on Asian-communism because China fell to the Communists under his watch on 1 October 1949.³ From a theater-military perspective, Truman and General Douglas MacArthur had to balance losing the initiative after the successful Inchon landings with the possibility and ramifications of direct Chinese involvement. Under the advice of MacArthur and others, and despite direct warnings from China, Truman chose to allow MacArthur to extend operations north of the 38th parallel with the goal of reunifying a non-Communist Korea.⁴

The Chinese, however, did attack across the Yalu River—just as they had warned. Truman and MacArthur failed to balance theater considerations with global imperatives

¹ Michael Howard, “The Use and Abuse of Military History,” *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, Feb 1962, 6.

² See President Harry S. Truman’s discussion concerning the importance of a Europe-first strategy in his book entitled, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman: Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), 380-381. Also see William Stueck’s discussion of NSC-68 in his book entitled, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 42.

³ See President Truman’s discussion concerning the Democratic Party’s record on communism in *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, 499. Also, see discussion concerning domestic pressure in Stueck’s, *The Korean War*, 42, 53.

and domestic realities. Hindsight is always 20/20; but Truman should have recognized that a fight with the Chinese, even if only a remote possibility, would drain scarce assets from Europe and would likely result in many casualties. One could argue that Truman made the decision to reunify Korea based on inaccurate information, but a reasonable person should have recognized that communism had been contained when the 38th parallel was reached and that crossing it violated the very principle upon which American presence was based. Attacking the North Koreans in their own territory with the goal of reunification was exactly what the North Koreans had done three months earlier—only this time forces marched north in the name of democracy rather than south in the name of communism.

The situation in Korea did not escalate out of control, and communism was eventually contained; but the Korean War produced many lasting effects. One was the impression it left on many of the future leaders of the Vietnam War, including President Lyndon B. Johnson.⁵ According to Admiral U.S.G. Sharp, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific theater from 1964 to 1968, the disproportionate and obsessive concern for Chinese and Soviet intervention prevented the military from achieving victory in Vietnam.⁶ The Korean example illustrates the ill effects of one domain, in this case theater-military imperatives, dominating the other two.

Roadmap of the Argument

This study approaches the problem of strategic balance by examining the evidence from Operation Torch, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War to determine what senior political and military leaders must do to formulate a strategy that fuses the context of all three domains. These cases were chosen for several reasons. First, the span between 1942 to 1991 provides sufficient time to show the difference between

⁴ See President Harry S. Truman's discussion concerning NSC-81 and operations north of the 38th parallel and Chou En Lai's threat in *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, 359-362. In addition, see Max Hastings's, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 135.

⁵ See discussion concerning the effect of the Korean War on Vietnam leaders in Mark Clodfelter's *Limits of Airpower: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989), 40, 43, and the concerns over Chinese intervention in H.R. McMaster's *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997), 148, 214, 235, 270, 313, 317.

short-term trends and general, long-lasting truths. Conclusions and implications become more valid if certain phenomena occur consistently over three generations of leaders and take place independent of varying social, economic, political, and technological environments. Second, these cases provide examples of total, partially limited, and quite-limited warfare that involved numerous global, domestic, and theater-military concerns and included new technologies, counter-insurgency operations, the threat of global-nuclear war, and intense domestic politics.

Chapters Two through Four examine the three cases previously mentioned in a consistent pattern. First, the general setting of the strategic problem is examined by addressing each domain separately. The author has chosen to discuss each domain in the following order consistently throughout the study: global, domestic, and theater-military—for the simple reason that in the spirit of Clausewitz, theater-military imperatives should be an extension of global and domestic politics. Global-strategic imperatives will include a brief description of the applicable political players, the political objectives, how other theaters fit into the overall strategy, and any coalition concerns that went beyond the theater under examination. Domestic political realities will include the general state of the economy, the climate of Congress, the level of domestic support for presidential policies, and any reelection-political issues that may have influenced decisions. Theater military considerations will include a brief description of the essential players involved, the military objectives, the military strategy, and any coalition concerns. After the review of each domain, the level and source of friction among domains is determined. Third, the study assesses the extent to which these conflicts were or were not successfully resolved and the consequences of resolution or lack thereof. Finally, the underlying reasons for resolution or failure of resolution will be determined by analyzing the formal and informal decision making processes. These include the personalities, intellectual capabilities, and communications skills of the participants and the role chance may have played in the process. The final chapter analyzes and synthesizes the results of all three case studies to determine those factors that inhibit or promote fusion of the three domains.

⁶ Admiral U.S.G. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1998), 4.

Limitations to the Research

This study involves human behavior and war—two of the most dynamic and unpredictable subjects known to man. Unlike a scientific research project, this study can not develop a formula or prescription that will enable people to create good strategy. Nor is it possible to understand all the considerations that were involved in the different decision making processes. This fact precludes definitive determination of cause and effect. Despite the aforementioned limitations, the study hopes to provide useful insights to help future national and military leaders develop better strategy. None of the individuals in the case studies intentionally created bad strategy, but some were better at it than others. There are good reasons why this is true, and this study seeks to find them. Throughout this study, the author has chosen to use the metaphor of a three-legged stool to demonstrate that a one-dimensional strategy may work in some instances; but like a one-legged stool, it is likely to succumb to gravity in due time. A strategy that balances at least two domains provides more support, but linking all three produces the most stable platform and the best chance of sitting without falling.

CHAPTER 2

OPERATION TORCH: PLEASING ALLIES IN AFRICA

I cannot help feeling that the past week represented a turning point in the whole war and that now we are on our way shoulder to shoulder.

*President Franklin Roosevelt to Winston Churchill,
27 July 1942*

Introduction

The Anglo-American decision to invade North Africa on 8 November 1942 was one of the most crucial decisions made during World War II. Two and a half years after Dunkirk, Operation Torch finally forced Adolph Hitler to fight on two fronts. Perhaps more importantly, Torch set the standard for future Anglo-American relations and determined the follow-on strategy for 1943 and the timing of Operation Overlord in 1944.⁷ The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the decision to fight the Germans on African soil in terms of senior political and military leaders' ability to reconcile the differences among global, domestic, and military domains and to determine the extent, consequences, and underlying reasons for reconciliation or lack thereof.

Global Domain

The goal of the Alliance during World War II was to defeat the Axis Powers; in order to accomplish that goal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt endeavored to keep the Alliance united. Domestic and military domains were extremely important, but keeping Great Britain and the Soviet Union in the war became the President's number one priority.

⁷ Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants, and Their War* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 133. Also, see Keith Sainsbury's, *The North African Landings 1942: A Strategic Decision* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976), 9.

The British Perspective

An understanding of the British perspective during the early years of World War II explains why Churchill pressured Roosevelt to accept an Anglo-American invasion in North Africa in lieu of an invasion on the Continent of Europe.⁸ By 10 May 1940, the British had seen Germany invade Poland, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France; and by 4 June, the British Expeditionary Force had been forced to evacuate the Continent. Churchill recognized the warning signs; and by the time France agreed to an armistice with Germany on 22 June, Churchill had sent Roosevelt no less than eight pleas for military assistance. Roosevelt, due to American isolationist policies at the time, denied each of them.⁹

Germany now occupied the northern coast of Europe; and on 16 July 1940, Hitler issued Directive No. 16, which outlined the plans for an invasion of England, codenamed Operation Sealion.¹⁰ The Battle of Britain started with the “Channel Battle” on 10 July and reached its peak in early September during the “Battle of London.” Minor raids continued until 30 October, but Hitler called off the planned invasion on 17 September and shifted priorities east when the Luftwaffe was unable to gain air superiority before the arrival of the autumn gales.¹¹

Churchill made the defense of Britain his first priority but sent spare assets to support operations in the Middle East and North Africa to protect his “precious Mediterranean.”¹² One year before the attack at Pearl Harbor, the British sent President Roosevelt a proposed strategy for 1941 that hinged on sea control. Churchill requested

⁸ Operation Gymnast was the British code name for the invasion of North African. The Anglo-American version was code named Operation Super-Gymnast and became Operation Torch in July 1942. Operation Sledgehammer was the US proposal to conduct an emergency cross-Channel invasion in 1942, while Operation Roundup was the US code name for the full-scale 1943 cross-Channel invasion, later known as Operation Overlord. These plans are detailed in later segments. See a breakout of all code names used during the planning stages of Operation Torch in Sainsbury’s, *The North African Landings 1942*, 13.

⁹ See the correspondences between 16 May and 15 June 1940 in Warren F. Kimball’s, *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, I. Alliance Emerging October 1933-November 1942*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 38-52.

¹⁰ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 91.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

additional American naval assistance to counter the losses incurred during the Battle of the Atlantic and to protect British interests from Japanese encroachment into Indo China, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies.¹³ After receiving Churchill's telegram, Roosevelt formulated the idea to subsidize the British war effort using lend-lease. Within three months, Roosevelt signed the \$7 billion dollar Lend-Lease Act of 1941 that Churchill later described as "the most unsordid act in the history of any nation."¹⁴

Churchill first briefed Roosevelt on his plans for an invasion of Northwest Africa, code named Operation Gymnast, during the first Atlantic Conference held in August 1941 at Argentia Bay.¹⁵ Churchill, a veteran of Gallipoli, based his "peripheral strategy" to invade North Africa on the desire to avoid a WW I-type direct clash with a numerically superior enemy.¹⁶ Despite the heavy requirements on the Eastern Front, Germany deployed twenty-five divisions in France and the Low Countries and had the capability to mobilize more if required. Churchill knew the British could form only six to ten divisions in 1941-42; therefore, he devised a strategy based on an indirect approach to warfare, reminiscent of the kind advocated by British theorist Basil Liddell Hart.

Until a permanent lodgment on the Continent was feasible, Britain would attempt to wear the Germans down with a naval blockade, a massive air bombardment, support to resistance movements in German-occupied territories, and ground attacks on vulnerable parts of enemy-occupied territory.¹⁷ Churchill believed that North Africa was the logical choice for an Allied ground offensive for several reasons. First, British forces were engaged there already. Second, Germany would be unable to move into North Africa via Spain and Portugal. Secure access to the Mediterranean would save millions of tons in shipping by precluding the long haul around the Cape, provide a departure point for attacks into Sicily and Italy, and might persuade the Vichy Government in North Africa

¹² Sainsbury, *The North African Landings 1942*, 16.

¹³ See C-43 in Kimball's *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 400.

¹⁴ Francis L. Loewenheim, Harold D. Langley, and Manfred Jonas, *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence*, (New York, NY: Saturday Review Press / E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1975), 125, 131.

¹⁵ See discussion of the Atlantic Charter in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 20, 85. See additional discussion in Herbert Feis's, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin: The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 20-23.

¹⁶ Sainsbury, *The North African Landings 1942*, 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 18.

to join the Allied cause.¹⁸ Churchill articulated a persuasive argument and walked away from the Atlantic Conference confident that Roosevelt agreed in principle with his North African strategy.¹⁹ On 2 November 1941, Churchill wrote his Chiefs of Staff, “We have definitely decided [on Gymnast]. There can be no going back on this.”²⁰

The Russian Perspective

An understanding of the Russian perspective during the early years of World War II explains why Joseph Stalin put so much pressure on Roosevelt and Churchill to open a second ground front against Germany in 1942. Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler in August of 1939 and invaded eastern Poland seventeen days after the start of the German blitzkrieg. However, the alliance was temporary at best; and with Operation Sealion put on hold, Hitler sought to secure a southern flank in the Balkans before the invasion of Russia. During the spring of 1941, Germany swept up Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria. In response to Germany’s invasion of Greece on 6 April 1941, Britain sent scarce assets from the North African theater to help Greece fight a losing struggle against the Wehrmacht.²¹ At the same time, Hitler sent Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to North Africa to begin a counter-offensive in response to the British victories against the Italian army. The British strategy to assist Greece backfired because Germany was able to occupy the entire country within two weeks and at the same time deal the British several defeats in North Africa.²²

Operation Barbarossa, the German code name for the invasion of Russia, began on 22 June 1941 and changed the character and outcome of the war. Germany sent three million troops, supported by thirty-three hundred tanks and seven thousand guns, across the Russian border in a three-pronged attack aimed at Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the center, and Kiev in the south.²³ By 30 September, the Wehrmacht captured 665,000 Russian soldiers at Kiev and occupied a front that extended from Leningrad in the north

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹ Churchill told his War Cabinet, “The discussion was not whether, but *how*.” See the quote in Feis’s, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 47.

²⁰ Sainsbury, *The North African Landings 1942*, 23.

²¹ See footnote two discussing German attack on Greece in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas’s, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 138.

²² See discussion concerning the spring of 1941 in Sainsbury’s, *The North African Landings 1942*, 17.

to the Crimean Peninsula in the south. The Red Army could smell defeat; but the winter of 1941 and the Soviet's fierce desire to protect the "Motherland" at all costs halted the already-weakened Wehrmacht's thrusts against Leningrad, Moscow, and Rostov. When Stalin determined that Japan was committed to a war with the United States, he reinforced the Eastern Front with ten divisions, one thousand tanks, and one thousand planes from his Siberian forces.²⁴ These additional war materials, combined with the tons of supplies sent from the Anglo-Americans, helped to sustain the Russians during the German onslaught.

Stalin's Red Army managed to halt the German advance by the time the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The leaders of the Alliance, however, knew the Wehrmacht would begin another offensive as soon as the ground hardened. Stalin continually pressured Roosevelt and Churchill for additional military aid and a major operation designed to pull at least forty German divisions from the Eastern Front.²⁵ As predicted, the situation quickly deteriorated after the Germans began their summer offensive in June 1942; and within a month, the Germans had control of Kharkov, Sevastopol, Voronezh, and Rostov and were poised to strike Stalingrad. The pressure to fulfill Stalin's request for a second front grew with each German thrust into Russia. While keeping the Alliance united was Roosevelt's first priority, domestic imperatives in the United States after the attack on Pearl Harbor threatened to change the overall strategy and influenced President Roosevelt's decision to implement Operation Torch.

Domestic Domain

President Roosevelt's domestic imperatives in 1942 were to boost national morale and gain democratic seats in the 1942 congressional elections. The Neutrality Act of 1939 reflected an isolationist mood in the United States that caused America to arrive late

²³ See map of Barbarossa plans in Keegan's, *The Second World War*, 174.

²⁴ See the discussion concerning the espionage skills of Richard Sorge in Gerhard L. Weinberg's, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 281-82, 546.

²⁵ See the description of the 8 July, 18 July, 2 August, and 4 September messages between Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt in Sainsbury's, *The North African Landings 1942*, 24-25.

in the game.²⁶ However, the attack on Pearl Harbor, coupled with Germany and Italy's declaration of war against the United States four days later, finally forced America to join the Allied cause directly.

President Roosevelt understood the concept of national morale and realized that Americans required real events to motivate them to mobilize their entire way of life and risk everything in defense of their country.²⁷ From an economic standpoint, Roosevelt mobilized the War Production Board in January of 1942 in an attempt to harness the nation's enormous resources. Roosevelt made it his job to ensure the war machine's one-hundred-million-dollar-a-day pricetag did not generate undue inflation.²⁸ The President's efforts did not go unnoticed. Gallup polls indicated that during the planning stages of Operation Torch, Roosevelt and Churchill shared approval ratings consistently above eighty percent.²⁹

Part of boosting national morale was getting American servicemen into action. Despite non-scientific results, a Gallup poll taken in late December 1941 provided Roosevelt with a mandate to execute his planned Europe-first, Pacific-second strategy. Only 15% of those surveyed believed Japan to be the more dangerous threat, while 64% believed Japan to be merely "a puppet" in Hitler's quest to dominate the world.³⁰ Despite current public support, President Roosevelt believed that without a military operation in Europe in 1942, the American public might show less interest in Europe and shift interest towards the Pacific.

What Roosevelt really wanted was American involvement in a military operation before the 3 November 1942 congressional elections. Roosevelt had seen President Woodrow Wilson lose control of Congress just before the end of World War I and did not want to repeat the same mistake.³¹ Being the consummate politician, Roosevelt told the

²⁶ It is interesting to note that a Gallup poll on page six of the 5 November 1941 edition of the *New York Times*, indicated 61% of the people agreed to lift certain restrictions to the Neutrality Act of 1939—up from only 30% in April 1941.

²⁷ See discussion concerning Roosevelt's ability to read the American public in Larrabee's, *Commander in Chief*, 139.

²⁸ See Roosevelt's threat to Congress in James MacGregor Burns's, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 463.

²⁹ Gallup polls taken from the 28 January (p. 17), 8 February (p. 33), and 13 May 1942 (p. 10) editions of the *New York Times*.

³⁰ See the Gallup poll results in the 23 December 1941 edition of the *New York Times*, p.4.

³¹ Ted Morgan, *FDR: A Biography* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 642.

public that the date of Torch was up to then-Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower—not the National Democratic Committee. However, behind the scenes, and as a precautionary step, Roosevelt ordered his special assistant, Harry Hopkins, to make sure the North African landings occurred no later than 30 October 1942.³² Behind closed doors, the President held up his hands in mock prayer to Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, and said, “Please make it before Election Day.”³³

The actual landings took place five days after the election; and although a causal relationship would be tough to defend, it is interesting to note that the Democrats lost forty-four seats in the House and nine in the Senate.³⁴ As James MacGregor Burns stated, “[Roosevelt] doubtless had few illusions about an automatic relation between an African landing—which might, after all, fail—and votes for Democratic candidates for Congress. He was probably content to settle for the plaudits he would receive for “rising above politics.”³⁵ Roosevelt’s quest to keep the Alliance united and his desire to boost national morale and influence election politics signified the need for a major military operation in 1942. The most pressing question was where to concentrate forces.

Theater-Military Domain

The European theater imperative in 1942 was to conduct a successful ground operation that would divert a significant number of German assets from the Eastern Front. Two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt, Churchill, and several of their senior military advisors met to discuss Allied strategy at the first Washington Conference, known as Arcadia.³⁶ The British went to Washington to ensure that the United States retain its previous commitment to a Europe-first strategy and to push the idea for an Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa. Lend-Lease had been in effect since March 1941, but Britain was concerned that Roosevelt would allow Admiral Ernest King and General Douglas MacArthur to cut British aid in favor of supplying the

³² Ibid., 645.

³³ James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), 290.

³⁴ Larrabee, *Commander in Chief*, 139.

³⁵ Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom*, 290.

Pacific.³⁷ However, the Prime Minister soon discovered that Roosevelt approved the Europe-first strategy previously outlined in ABC-1, the Allied version of the American Rainbow-5 war plan.³⁸ By the end of the Arcadia Conference, the combined military staffs agreed to increase Allied bombing, expand assistance to Russia by gaining possession of the North African coast, and invade the European Continent in 1943 by way of the Balkans or Western Europe.³⁹ However, before Churchill departed for London, British setbacks in Africa and Southwest Asia, drastic shipping losses in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and increased American shipping demands in the Southwest Pacific put a hold on any plans for a substantial North African operation.⁴⁰ Everyone agreed to a Europe-first strategy, but senior United States military leaders disagreed strongly with Churchill's North Africa strategy and had the time required to change Roosevelt's mind.

As early as January 1941, American war planners determined that a large ground force in Western Europe aimed at the jugular would be required to defeat Germany.⁴¹ Shortly after Arcadia, American Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, General Marshall, and then Major General Eisenhower argued to the President that an Operation in North Africa would be a dangerous waste of combat resources and would delay a cross-Channel invasion of the Continent.⁴² Roosevelt agreed, and Eisenhower began to develop a cross-Channel strategy based on the following tenets: Northwestern Europe was the only place

³⁶ For an excellent review of the Washington Conference, see Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 172-174.

³⁷ See the discussion of Pacific concerns in Larry I. Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3, "The Right Man for the Job"*, December 7, 1941-May 31, 1943 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 157. Also, see the Pacific discussion in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 21.

³⁸ It is interesting to note that the original concept for a Europe-first strategy was developed during Naval War College discussions in April 1940 and later developed into "Plan Dog" by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Harold R. Stark, and his staff. As early as December 1940, Stark formulated the concept to exchange ideas with a British delegation of top military leaders. Stark's idea was the impetus behind the American-British Conversations (ABC) held in early 1941 in Washington D.C. These meeting were kept secret due to political pressure to avoid any perception that the US was aligning with Britain to plan for war. An account of these events is found in Mark Skinner Watson's, *United States Army in World War II, The War Department, Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington D.C.: Historical Division United States Army, 1950), 117-123, 375-380.

³⁹ See quotes from the conference summary report in Feis's, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 47-48.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴¹ See the ABC-1 report in Watson's, *United States Army in World War II*, 374-377.

⁴² Feis, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 48.

the Allies could execute a massive attack due to sea distances and well developed lines of communications, 1943 was the earliest date for an invasion, providing the Soviet Union stayed in the war, and air superiority could not be achieved in a different theater.⁴³

Eisenhower's final plan consisted of a year-long buildup in England, code named Operation Bolero; a five-division "emergency" cross-Channel invasion in mid-September 1942, code named Operation Sledgehammer (designed in case either the Russian or German armies collapsed); and a forty-eight-division, full-scale invasion of the Continent in the spring of 1942, code named Operation Roundup.⁴⁴ President Roosevelt approved the plan on 1 April 1942 and sent Harry Hopkins and Marshall to London to brief the plan to Churchill and his staff. Anglo-American relations had been relatively smooth up to this point. The two months Marshall and his staff used to change Roosevelt's mind allowed Churchill and his planning staff to become even more intent on Gymnast. Anglo-American tensions about where and when to fight the Wehrmacht would test the strength of the Alliance and would require balance and reconciliation among all domains.

Source and Level of Friction

Military imperatives first clashed with global imperatives when Marshall and Hopkins carried the Marshall Memorandum to London on 8 April 1942. The British were thoroughly impressed and agreed *in principle* with the "momentous" American plan for a cross-Channel invasion, with the caveat that it depended on how well the Russians were doing on the Eastern Front.⁴⁵ However, British War Cabinet members believed that Marshall placed too much confidence and emphasis on Operation Sledgehammer. In Marshall's defense, he knew that Sledgehammer was the only option he could offer in 1942, and that any plan that waited until 1943 would not go over well with his British audience. Behind the scenes, General Sir Alan Brooke, Marshall's British counterpart, believed Operation Sledgehammer would quickly "be pushed back to the Sea" and thus

⁴³ Bland, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 158. In addition, see Feis's, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 49.

⁴⁴ See Eisenhower's secret memorandum dated 28 February 1942 in Alfred D. Chandler Jr.'s, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years I* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 149-155. See additional details in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 158.

⁴⁵ See Churchill's enthusiastic comments about the US plan in Larrabee's, *Commander in Chief*, 135.

not help the Russian situation on the Eastern Front. Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations, believed French ports were too small, and landing craft were too few to match the twenty-five German divisions in France and the Low Countries.⁴⁶ Perhaps the most logical and most obvious concern, and one that did not require complicated estimates, was Churchill's notion that if Sledgehammer was not a viable option, a cross-Channel invasion in 1943 would leave the Russians without a second ground front in 1942. General Marshall sensed reservations from the British but left London confident that an agreement had been reached.⁴⁷ Little did Marshall know that on his way out of Whitehall, the British crossed the fingers of their left hand while they saluted him with their right. General Hastings Ismay summed it up best when he stated, "Our American friends went happily homeward under the mistaken impression that we had committed ourselves [to a cross-Channel invasion]."⁴⁸

Another source of friction between the Allies was Vyacheslav Molotov's influence on Roosevelt. In May 1942, Molotov, the Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs, met with Churchill in London and Roosevelt in Washington to discuss the second-front issue.⁴⁹ Churchill was careful not to make a commitment during Molotov's visit, but Roosevelt promised Molotov a second ground front in *Europe* in 1942 after Marshall had assured him that Sledgehammer could be done.⁵⁰ Stalin was pleased to hear about Roosevelt's promise—a promise that the President would later regret making.

Extent of Resolution

The British remained secretive about their reservations concerning Sledgehammer for over a month. It was not until Molotov was on his way to Washington that Churchill finally informed Roosevelt of the serious reservations he had concerning a

⁴⁶ The landing craft issue was a significant limiting factor in all future amphibious operations, both in the Pacific and in European theaters. See the British reaction to the Marshall Memorandum and landing craft issues in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 158-159, 222, 532-33, 696.

⁴⁷ See Radio Nos. 2387, 2412, and 2432 for Marshall's reaction to meetings with the British in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 159-164. Also, see Feis's discussion in *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 50.

⁴⁸ Morgan, *FDR: A Biography*, 638. Also, see secret memorandum C-70 in Kimball's, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 458. Here, Churchill cabled Roosevelt to let him know "The campaign of 1943 is straightforward" and "The proposal for Sledgehammer has met the difficulties in a sound manner."

⁴⁹ For a full account of these events, see Feis's, *Churchill Roosevelt Stalin*, 65-80.

cross-Channel invasion in 1942.⁵¹ The cable had little impact because Roosevelt promised Molotov that the Allies would conduct Sledgehammer in 1942. As a result, Churchill sent the charming Lord Mountbatten to Washington in early June to inform Roosevelt that a European landing was impossible given the number of landing craft available and that Britain would likely veto the Sledgehammer option.⁵² Mountbatten's visit was crucial. After articulating an impressive argument, Mountbatten informed Churchill that the President was wavering on the idea of a cross-Channel invasion. Armed with this information, Churchill requested an immediate visit with Roosevelt to reach a final decision on the operations for 1942-43.⁵³

Like Mountbatten, Marshall and Stimson sensed indecision in the President; and in a meeting with Roosevelt on 17 June, they strongly protested Gymnast because they were convinced it would delay Roundup until after 1943.⁵⁴ Marshall attempted to persuade Roosevelt with five additional memoranda, the first of which showed how desperate he had become. Marshall stated that the difficulties of Sledgehammer were formidable but not insurmountable and that the Germans had accepted insurmountable obstacles in all of their great thrusts.⁵⁵

On 19 June, at Hyde Park, Churchill told Roosevelt that Gymnast was the best option in 1942 because he opposed any cross-Channel operation that could not establish a permanent beachhead.⁵⁶ Two days later, Churchill and Roosevelt met with several senior political and military leaders at the second Washington Conference to attempt to finalize the Allied strategy for 1942-43. During the meetings, the Allies learned that Rommel had captured Tobruk and thirty-three thousand British soldiers.⁵⁷ Both sides articulated their positions effectively, but the deteriorating situation in North Africa reinforced in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁵¹ See 28 May 1941 secret memorandum C-91 in Kimball's, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 494.

⁵² Sainsbury, *The North African Landings 1942*, 106-107.

⁵³ See 13 June 1941 secret memorandum C-101 in Kimball's, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 510.

⁵⁴ See Marshall and Stimson's reaction in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 243.

⁵⁵ See secret memorandums dated 23 and 30 June, 10 and 13 July, in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 246-275.

⁵⁶ See Churchill's Sledgehammer concerns in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 244.

⁵⁷ See discussion concerning second Washington Conference in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 221-222. Also, see excellent synopsis of second Washington Conference in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 242-246.

Churchill's eyes the importance of the Gymnast option. The fall of Tobruk probably influenced the President to suggest that a large American force could defend a line from Alexandria to Tehran. Roosevelt's idea shocked Marshall so badly that he actually left the room in disgust without saying a word.⁵⁸ The conference ended on 25 June without a consensus. Upon his return to London, Churchill decided to kill Sledgehammer with an 8 July cable to Roosevelt, which stated, "No responsible British General, Admiral or Air Marshal is prepared to recommend Sledgehammer as a practicable operation in 1942. I am sure myself that Gymnast is by far the best chance for effective relief to the Russian front in 1942".⁵⁹

In response to Churchill's cable, General Marshall and Admiral King wrote a 10 July memorandum to Roosevelt that recommended switching to a Pacific strategy if the British insisted on North Africa.⁶⁰ The President still agreed with the Sledgehammer option, but did not like the Pacific idea or the tone of Marshall's memorandum. Roosevelt thought the move was like "taking up your dishes and going away."⁶¹ In a clever response, President Roosevelt asked Marshall and King for their detailed plans for a major Pacific operation, knowing that the plans did not exist and that they would take weeks to develop.

Tired of the indecision and in-house bickering, the President sent Marshall, King, and Hopkins to London on 16 July with specific written instructions to find the best alternative for a 1942 military operation. The President told Marshall:

You will carefully investigate the possibility of executing Sledgehammer. . . . It might be the turning point which would save Russia this year. Sledgehammer is of such grave importance that every reason calls for accomplishment of it. . . . You should strongly urge immediate all-out preparations for it, that it be pushed with utmost vigor, and that it be executed whether or not Russian collapse becomes imminent. . . . If Sledgehammer is finally and definitely out of the picture, I want you to consider . . . another place for US troops to fight in 1942.⁶²

⁵⁸ Marshall wrote a memorandum to Roosevelt the next day explaining why the President's idea was not a good one. See memorandum in Bland's, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 245-246.

⁵⁹ C-107, Kimball's, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 520-521.

⁶⁰ Bland, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3*, 270-271, 276.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 277.

Marshall tried desperately to convince the British of the merits of Sledgehammer, but they were not interested. After listening to British counter-arguments, Marshall conceded that Sledgehammer was unlikely to be successful; but he continued to push Roundup and discredit Gymnast.⁶³ Marshall finally folded after the British War Cabinet, on the same day, voted against Sledgehammer. Marshall told Forrest C. Pogue in a 1956 personal interview, “We were at a complete stalemate. Churchill was rabid for Africa. Roosevelt for Africa. . . . Both were aware of political necessities. It is something we fail to take into consideration. . . . [O]fficers lack knowledge of political factors which political leaders must keep in mind.”⁶⁴ Churchill ceremoniously renamed Gymnast, Operation Torch on 24 July, and the matter officially closed on 27 July when Roosevelt sent Churchill a secret cable congratulating him on a job well done—on their way “shoulder to shoulder.”⁶⁵

The reason Marshall remembered Roosevelt as “rabid for Africa” after the second Washington Conference was that the President had reconciled all the *differences* among global, domestic, and military domains. Roosevelt destroyed whatever might have been left of Sledgehammer after the second Washington Conference. Although not perfect, Gymnast offered a more balanced strategy; and the only thing Roosevelt had to do was reduce the diplomatic *tension* he created with Stalin and foster an understanding between a general and his Commander-in-Chief. Employing his astute political skills, Roosevelt used Marshall to reduce the tension in the Anglo-American Alliance. He sent his Army Chief of Staff to London knowing that Sledgehammer was impractical. Although the tone of Roosevelt’s instructions to Marshall resonated with Sledgehammer, the trip was in reality its death sentence. The President knew the British would turn down Sledgehammer, but perhaps he might have wanted to receive more political “plaudits” for

⁶³ Ibid., 277.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 278.

⁶⁵ See R-170 in Kimball’s, *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 543-544.

allowing his top military commander to make the call. Allowing Marshall to take responsibility would save face for Roosevelt; and at the same time, create the impression that he stayed out of military matters. Churchill was correct when he stated that Roosevelt's message was "the most massive and masterly document on war policy that I ever saw from his hand."⁶⁶ It takes a politician to know one.

Consequences of Resolution

The Anglo-American decision to implement Operation Torch produced many consequences that influenced the rest of the war. Historians argue about the merits of Torch versus waiting for Roundup in 1943, but what might have happened is not the subject of this study. Operation Torch did produce a negative response from Stalin, but it set the Allied victory into motion. Stalin was not pleased to find out that the Allies had broken their promise to open a second ground front in Europe in 1942. Gymnast was not what Stalin had in mind, and it would require a visit from Churchill in August 1942 to explain why Sledgehammer would not work. The Soviet leader was not overly impressed, especially when Churchill had to explain that convoys to Russia would be reduced to prepare for the invasion. Realistically, Stalin could do nothing but wait and hope that his army could hold up while Gymnast did the job it was designed to do.

The most important consequence of resolution was an eventual Allied victory over the Axis powers. The North African landings and the subsequent invasions of Sicily and Italy forced Hitler to divert assets to the Mediterranean theater and began to make a difference on the Eastern Front. The combination of Russian counter-offensives, the Anglo-American operations in the Mediterranean, and the combined bomber offensive from England began to turn the tide of war in favor of the Allies. Marshall's warning that Torch would delay a cross-Channel invasion until 1944 proved accurate, but his prediction that Torch would give the Wehrmacht a year to recuperate proved incorrect. The subsequent operations in Sicily and Italy did present the appearance that the British were leading their junior partners about the Mediterranean by their strategic noses, but that would all change by the summer of 1944.

⁶⁶ Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 225.

Another important consequence of resolution was the close relationship that Torch developed between the British and Americans. Many historians believe the British hid their true feelings from Marshall and Hopkins after their meeting in April 1942 because the Anglo-American relationship was so new. The British revealed their reservations with the American plan, but they did not feel comfortable saying so. Once again Ismay summed it up best when he stated, “If we had known each other better, we could have taken them out to dinner and said, “Look here, old boy, this sounds lovely but surely we are talking in terms of the end of 1943.”⁶⁷ Evidence suggests that Churchill did not think it was politically feasible to reject the American plans in April, but the collapsing situation in the Mediterranean during the second Washington Conference forced the Prime Minister to throw all political expediency aside in favor of helping his troops in North Africa. After Marshall reluctantly but dutifully complied with Roosevelt’s support of the British position in July, the Anglo-American Alliance became stronger than before.

Underlying Reasons for Resolution

The underlying reasons for the decision to conduct Operation Torch were Roosevelt’s ability to concentrate on essentials, his personality and communications skills, and his relationship with Churchill. This statement is not intended to minimize other factors in the equation or deprecate the leadership and intellectual skills of the many men who made Torch a reality. However, the final decision to execute Gymnast in lieu of Sledgehammer belonged to the President. Churchill could have vetoed Sledgehammer, but he knew that Gymnast would likely fail without support from the United States. Stalin made it very clear that he preferred a second ground front in Europe, but he had no choice but to accept whatever assistance he could secure. Churchill and Stalin had only to *recognize* the differences among global, domestic, and military domains. Roosevelt, on the other hand, actually had to *reconcile* the differences among the imperatives and reduce the tension and friction that had the potential to cripple the Alliance.

⁶⁷ Larrabee, *Commander in Chief*, 134.

Stalin's grip on Russia determined his domestic and military imperatives. The only global decision Stalin had to make was how many German divisions the Anglo-American operation should divert from the Eastern Front. Gymnast would allow Churchill to have his cake and eat it too and, using another slightly modified metaphor, kill three birds with one stone. Britain's temporary reprieve from the German onslaught in October 1940 was short-lived after the disasters in Greece in March 1941 and Tobruk in June 1942. Gymnast would satisfy the global imperative to help Russia; protect British colonial possessions and troops in the Mediterranean; and boost national pride by giving British ground troops a chance to revenge Dunkirk, the Battle of London, and Tobruk.

Roosevelt, on the other hand, had to choose between Marshall, who became his most trusted military advisor, and the other members of the Alliance. Fortunately, Roosevelt had the uncanny ability to concentrate on the essentials and as Eric Larabee stated, "While not needing to represent himself before the public as a strategist in the Churchill mold, he was one nonetheless and, if concentration on essentials is the hallmark of good strategy, the better of the two."⁶⁸ Roosevelt recognized that Churchill's Gymnast strategy solved the global strategic imperative to help the Russians in 1942 and the domestic imperative to get American troops in action before the 1942 congressional elections if possible and before the American public became impatient with the Europe-first strategy. Marshall and Stimson's "momentous" Sledgehammer plan appeared on the surface to accomplish the global and domestic imperatives as well; however, the key to Roosevelt's brilliance was his ability to see Sledgehammer for what it was—a non-viable "emergency-only" option. Roosevelt realized that Sledgehammer would threaten the Alliance and would not provide a reasonable chance for operational success. This ability to separate the chaff from the essentials in a given situation stems from Roosevelt's personality and communications skills.

Most people link Roosevelt with domestic politics and the New Deal, but he was an architect of military victory as well. What stands out most about Roosevelt during the Torch decision was his professional competence and communication skills. Roosevelt's

⁶⁸ Larrabee, *Commander in Chief*, 3.

actions here support the notion that leaders are born, not developed. Richard Neustadt sums it up best, “The White House was for him almost a family seat, and like the other Roosevelt he regarded the whole country almost as a family property.”⁶⁹ Roosevelt had a quick mind, was friendly, and had a voracious appetite for books. He continued to develop a strong intellect at Harvard and Columbia and eventually entered public service as a state Senator from New York.⁷⁰ The President possessed a strong intellectual background, but his communications skills solidified his personality. Roosevelt’s intellect and common sense allowed him to see the holes in Sledgehammer. However, if not for Roosevelt’s willingness to listen to others, he may have never heard the opposing arguments that turned out to be the better solution to his problem.

Roosevelt liked to surround himself with other intelligent people and listened to what they had to say. Lord Mountbatten’s visit to Washington D.C. in June of 1941 illustrates this point. Young Roosevelt grew up reading books by Alfred T. Mahan; and like his cousin Theodore, served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. One would think that a President of the United States with that kind of experience would not want to hear advice concerning naval matters—especially from a British officer. However, Mountbatten impressed Roosevelt with his knowledge concerning amphibious operations. The President’s ability to listen and his professional background enabled him to understand Lord Mountbatten’s argument that Sledgehammer would fail. This meeting was crucial to the Torch decision because without it, the operation would have been delayed. Mountbatten said it was “probably my most important task of the war.”⁷¹

Most people do not know how close Roosevelt and Churchill were and what an enormous impact their relationship had on the Torch decision, the Alliance in general, and the outcome of World War II.⁷² Nearly everyone knows a quote from Winston Churchill; his common sense and intellect were undeniable. When Winston talked, people listened because he was charismatic and could articulate an argument with

⁶⁹ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1960), 4.

⁷⁰ See personality description of FDR in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas’s, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 16-19.

⁷¹ Sainsbury, *The North African Landings 1942*, 108.

⁷² See discussion concerning the relationship between Roosevelt and Churchill in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas’s introduction to *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 3-76. Also, see Kimball’s introduction to *Churchill & Roosevelt*, 3-20.

conviction. Despite the Neutrality Act of 1939, FDR opened diplomatic channels with the newly appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, a week after blitzkrieg began.⁷³ Before Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945, the two leaders wrote over seventeen hundred letters to each other, spent 120 days in each other's company, and attended nine conferences around the world together.⁷⁴ They did not always get along, but they always respected the other's opinion and always left communication channels open.

Roosevelt and Churchill developed a close bond that got them through many tough times. For example, after hearing about the British retreat to El Alamein during the second Washington Conference in June 1942, Roosevelt bypassed all military channels and immediately gave Churchill three hundred new Sherman tanks to help "ease the pain."⁷⁵ Churchill knew that once the American war machine kicked into gear, Britain's influence in the world would diminish in the shadows of the United States; but he also knew it was necessary for victory over the Axis Powers. It is difficult to measure the impact these two had on the Allied victory; but it is safe to say that without them, events would have been very different.

Conclusion

The senior political and military leaders of the Anglo-American Alliance were the right men for the job. Hitler, in his wildest dreams, never imagined that men like Roosevelt, Churchill, and Marshall would rise to the level they did. A thousand details and decisions went into Operation Torch, and thousands more were needed at the same time in the Pacific. Men such as Churchill, Marshall, Mountbatten, Hopkins, and Stalin had a major impact on the strategy for 1942-43; but it is evident that Roosevelt had the toughest decision to make during the seven months after Pearl Harbor. The President concentrated on the essentials and used his intellect and communications skills to ensure that each leg of the strategic stool was balanced to provide a stable platform despite

⁷³ See Roosevelt's personal memorandum to Churchill and footnote 2 that highlights the Neutrality Act of 1939 in Loewenheim, Langley, and Jonas's, *Roosevelt and Churchill*, 79, 89, 159.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 221.

significant external pressures. Chance brought the Allies together, but trust and loyalty made them a true Alliance.

CHAPTER 3

DILEMMA IN VIETNAM

I feel like a hitchhiker caught in a hailstorm on a Texas highway. I can't run. I can't hide. And I can't make it stop.

—President Lyndon B. Johnson

Introduction

President Lyndon B. Johnson's address to the nation on the afternoon of 28 July 1965 announced a significant escalation in American involvement in Vietnam. The decision to deploy forty-four battalions to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) rested squarely on the President's shoulders and signified to the world a change in strategy and the beginning of a land war in Asia. This decision led to several significant short and long-term consequences that are still being felt today. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the decision to "Americanize" the Vietnam War in 1965. The analysis will focus on senior political and military leaders' ability to reconcile the differences among global, domestic, and theater-military considerations and to determine the extent, consequences, and underlying reasons for reconciliation or lack thereof.

Historical Background

The following brief history explains the genesis of communism in Vietnam and why the Johnson administration placed so much emphasis on its suppression in 1965.⁷⁶ The Vietnamese gained their independence from China in 1428. French missionaries arrived in Vietnam in 1627 and existed peacefully among the Vietnamese until tensions began to rise in 1847. Ho Chi Minh was born in central Vietnam in 1910 but left at age twenty-one to study communism in France and Russia. Ho returned to Vietnam covertly in 1941 to form the Vietnam Independence League, whose members became known as

the Vietminh, to fight both the Japanese and the French during World War II. The Japanese left Vietnam in 1945; but Ho's Vietminh forces continued to fight the French for another decade, culminating with an impressive victory at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. Two months later, negotiators at the Geneva Conference divided the country at the seventeenth parallel into the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) in the North and the RVN in the south. Soviet and Chinese Communists backed Ho Chi Minh, and President Eisenhower backed RVN President Ngo Dinh Diem with financial assistance and 342 United States military advisors.

Communist insurgency in the RVN began as early as October 1957, but the American "Vietnam Era" officially began on 8 July 1959 when Communist guerrillas killed the first two Americans at Bienhoa air base.⁷⁷ Before his term ended, President Eisenhower warned newly elected President John F. Kennedy that the Communist coup d'état in Laos required more attention than the situation in Vietnam.⁷⁸ Despite Charles de Gaulle's warning that Vietnam would trap the United States in "a bottomless military and political swamp," President Kennedy turned his sights toward Vietnam after Laos became an independent and neutral state.⁷⁹ Similar to the Vietminh of twenty years past, Ho formed the National Liberation Front in late 1960, whose members became known as the Vietcong, to infiltrate into the RVN and attempt to establish a unified, Communist Vietnam.

In an effort to get rid of "Johnson's damn long face," President Kennedy sent the Vice President to Southeast Asia in May of 1961.⁸⁰ Being the consummate politician, Johnson publicly hailed Diem as the "Winston Churchill" of Southeast Asia and declared that the loss of Vietnam would compel America to fight "on the beaches of Wai-kiki."⁸¹ According to Robert Dallek, "The trip was a microcosm of Johnson's career: a grandiose,

⁷⁶ The information contained in the following two paragraphs is derived from the Vietnam chronology provided in Stanley Karnow's, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 686-695.

⁷⁷ See a timeline of the United States advisory buildup in the Department of Defense study, *United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967*, popularly known as the Pentagon Papers (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), IV. B. 3., 1-23.

⁷⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 264.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 265.

⁸⁰ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12.

⁸¹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 267.

temperamental man doing outlandish things simultaneously to get attention and improve the lot of the poor.”⁸² The Kennedy administration’s tough anti-communist stance influenced JFK’s decision to deepen United States involvement in Vietnam and made it all but impossible to back out without damaging American prestige. The administration, however, kept the advisory buildup in Southeast Asia a secret because it violated the 1954 Geneva Accords.

President Kennedy may have stated publicly that “We shall pay any price, bear any burden for the defense of freedom . . .,” and he may have increased American presence in the RVN, but he did so begrudgingly and with mental reservations.⁸³ On 22 November 1963, President Johnson unexpectedly inherited the declared policy of containment from Kennedy and assumed, like his predecessor, that an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam was vital to American interests and credibility. In his memoirs, Johnson states

I made a solemn private vow: I would devote every hour of every day during the remainder of John Kennedy’s unfulfilled term to achieving the goals he had set. That meant seeing things through in Vietnam as well as coping with the many other international and domestic problems he had faced. I made this promise not out of blind loyalty but because I was convinced that the broad lines of his policy, in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, had been right.⁸⁴

Unfortunately, Johnson was rarely “in-the-know” with Kennedy and not privy to the many nuances and anxieties within Kennedy’s mind concerning escalation in Vietnam.⁸⁵ Johnson may have observed Kennedy control the 1961 Berlin crisis and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis; but his personality and ability to balance global, domestic, and theater-military domains, compared to Kennedy’s, were as different as the two states from which they came.

⁸² Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 13.

⁸³ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 265.

⁸⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 42.

⁸⁵ See discussion concerning the relationship between President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson in Robert Dallek’s, *Flawed Giant*, 7-12.

Global Domain

President Johnson's global imperative and highest priority in July 1965 was to maintain the global credibility of the United States by halting the spread of communism in Southeast Asia while preventing the outbreak of World War III with the Soviet Union and/or China. In his memoirs, Johnson states, "If we ran out on Southeast Asia, I could see trouble ahead in every part of the globe—not just in Asia but in the Middle East and in Europe, in Africa and in Latin America. I was convinced that our retreat from this challenge would open the path to World War III."⁸⁶ The President told Doris Kearns, "If you let a bully come into your front yard one day, the next day he'll show up on your porch and the day after that he'll rape your wife in your own bed."⁸⁷

Fueling the fire was Johnson's consuming fear that right-wing adversaries would label him and his administration as "soft on communism" if Ho Chi Minh reunified Vietnam—just as Senator Joseph McCarthy had done to President Harry Truman after China fell in 1949.⁸⁸ Two days after becoming President, Johnson pledged that he would not "lose Vietnam," and that he was "not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."⁸⁹

Johnson's global imperative was to halt the spread of communism into Southeast Asia; although, he could not afford a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union and/or China. Using the Cuban missile crisis as the standard for avoiding World War III, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara developed a "graduated response" strategy to ensure Hanoi, Peking, or Moscow did not receive the wrong "signal" and to avoid domestic and international political opposition to widening the war.⁹⁰ To McNamara, a former executive at Ford Motor Company and a consummate analyst, the aim of force was not to compel the enemy to do your will; instead, it was to communicate to him.⁹¹ In

⁸⁶ Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 147-148.

⁸⁷ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1976), 258.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁸⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 339.

⁹⁰ Maxwell Taylor developed the "flexible response" strategy for President Kennedy as an alternative to President Eisenhower's "massive retaliation" strategy. Both concepts were based on a force structure capable of carrying out military options across the spectrum of conflict. See H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 62, 73-5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

an effort to convince Hanoi to stop supporting the Vietcong, McNamara, without the consent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recommended the gradual escalation of military options ranging from border control operations into Laos and North Vietnam and, as a last resort, bombing North Vietnamese targets and mining Haiphong Harbor.⁹² Johnson accepted McNamara's proposal with a "religious zeal" and exacted the new strategy on the military by signing National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288 on 17 March 1964.⁹³ This directive enabled Johnson and McNamara to control the escalation in Vietnam, while minimizing the negative effect it might have on the November 1964 presidential election. Johnson told Kearns

I knew I could keep the control of the war in my own hands. . . . But this control—so essential for preventing World War III—would be lost the moment we unleashed a total assault on the North—for that would be rape rather than seduction—and then there would be no turning back. The Chinese reaction would be instant and total.⁹⁴

There is little doubt that Johnson's fear of direct Chinese and/or Soviet involvement influenced his decision-making, especially when it came to target selection and rules of engagement for the military. According to Harry G. Summers Jr., "[The graduated response strategy] was still haunted by the specter of a nuclear World War III and we were still more concerned with avoiding that eventuality than with the traditional task of defeating the enemy."⁹⁵ General William C. Westmoreland, Commander United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), argued that, "Influencing many of the major decisions was an almost paranoid fear of nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union and a corresponding anxiety over active participation by Chinese Communist troops."⁹⁶ The appropriateness of Johnson's fears is examined later, but it is clear that he believed a direct confrontation with the Chinese and/or Soviets would destroy his legacy and his Great Society.

Domestic Domain

⁹² Ibid., 75.

⁹³ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 265.

⁹⁵ Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 57.

President Johnson's domestic imperative in July 1965 was to continue to introduce and secure legislation for his Great Society. When Johnson unexpectedly became President, he continued Kennedy's domestic programs; but he also wanted to prove to himself and to the nation that he could build a "Johnson program, different in tone, fighting and aggressive."⁹⁷ Johnson and his advisors developed plans for a Great Society that would "improve the lot of the poor" and help reelect the President in November 1964. In Johnson's words, the Great Society would "Commit the nation to press on with the War on Poverty, to provide greater educational opportunities for all American children, to offer medical care to the elderly, to conserve our water and air and natural resources, and to tackle the country's long-standing housing shortage."⁹⁸

Before Johnson could make the Great Society a reality, he needed to win the 1964 presidential election. He believed that a resounding victory at the polls would "exorcise the ghost of Kennedy" and finally give him a mandate of his own.⁹⁹ Two months before the election, on 2 August 1964, DRVNN patrol boats attacked the *USS Maddox* in the Tonkin Gulf, prompting the United States Congress to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The resolution gave Johnson extraordinary power to act in Vietnam; but after the Vietcong attacked Bienhoa air base on 30 October, the President refrained from approving retaliatory attacks due to the upcoming election.¹⁰⁰ Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater and others in Congress pressured Johnson to act, but the President did not want to see his personal and domestic mandate "die in the jungles of Vietnam."¹⁰¹

Johnson's attitude changed within a year, but his short-term strategy paid off when he beat Goldwater by over sixteen million votes—the largest margin of victory in United States history to that date—and persuaded Congress to pass every piece of legislation for his Great Society during the spring of 1965.¹⁰² In the fall of 1965, a

⁹⁶ William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 411.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹⁸ Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 104.

⁹⁹ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 372.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰¹ John G. Albert and Dennis E. Showalter, *An American Dilemma: Vietnam, 1964-1973* (Chicago, IL: Imprint Publications, 1993), 28.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 28.

Gallup poll indicated that sixty-four percent of Americans believed that greater involvement in Vietnam was necessary, while only twenty-nine percent believed that the United States would achieve victory.¹⁰³ Although these results were not scientific, the American public and Congress gave Johnson the mandate he desired, which allowed him to focus on the military situation in Vietnam.

Theater-Military Domain

Theater commanders in Indochina endeavored to help the RVN eliminate the Communist insurgency and to establish and secure a stable and independent, non-Communist South Vietnam. This objective, however, required a strong government in Saigon capable of unifying the people: a condition that never came to fruition. During the Kennedy administration, the United States sent fifteen thousand military advisors and millions of dollars worth of military equipment to the army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to help combat the insurgency. The Strategic Hamlet Program—a significant component of the strategy—attempted to use military, social, psychological, economic, and political means to provide security to rural peasants and to develop support for the central government.¹⁰⁴ The program failed, however, due to increased Vietcong resistance, the ARVN's unwillingness and inability to support the villages that came under Vietcong attack, and continuous political instability within the RVN government.¹⁰⁵

On 26 November 1963, President Johnson had signed NSAM 273 to reaffirm President Kennedy's previous policies, support the new regime headed by General Duong Van Minh, direct efforts in the Mekong Delta, and plan for the eventual withdrawal of American advisors.¹⁰⁶ However, the situation in the RVN did not improve. McNamara went to Saigon again in May 1964 and reported to President Johnson that all

¹⁰³ George H. Gallup, ed., *The Gallup Poll* (Random House, 1972), vol. 3, 1971-2.

¹⁰⁴ The following discussion is based on the description of the Strategic Hamlet Program provided in Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, IV. B. 2., i-36. See also Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 66-68.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, IV. C. 1., a-2.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. B. 3., 37. Also, see plans for phased withdrawal of U.S. forces in IV. B. 4., 1-40.

fourteen strategic provinces were in “critical condition.”¹⁰⁷ The RVN government had changed seven times in 1964, but each time the same faces reappeared “like a reshuffled pack of cards.”¹⁰⁸

American political and military leadership changed as well in 1964 when Johnson replaced Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Maxwell Taylor and replaced MACV Commander General Paul D. Harkins with General William C. Westmoreland. Lodge left Vietnam to run for president and Johnson chose Westmoreland because he “appreciated his willingness to suppress his convictions about how the war should be fought in the larger interest of team play.”¹⁰⁹ Although Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific, was the theater commander, General Westmoreland took responsibility for ground troops and air operations immediately north of the demilitarized zone.¹¹⁰ Shortly after Westmoreland took command, McNamara approved the general’s HOP TAC program, which was designed to expand pacification slowly outside of Saigon into six provinces.¹¹¹ HOP TAC failed for the same reasons as the Strategic Hamlet Program had before. Despite suffering far more casualties than the ARVN, the Vietcong in 1964 increased to over 170,000 troops and showed no signs of leaving.¹¹²

Hanoi did not appear to get the right “signal”; therefore, senior political and military leaders turned to airpower for swift results but quickly discovered that earlier predictions concerning airpower effectiveness against the DRVN were correct. In August 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed a list of ninety-four targets in North Vietnam that would destroy the will and capability of the DRVNN to continue support for the insurgency in the RVN.¹¹³ When high-ranking senior political and military leaders ran the targets through a simulation entitled Sigma II-64, they found that no amount of pressure could stop the Communists—including General Curtis LeMay’s notion to “bomb the North Vietnamese back to the stone age.” Among other things, the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., IV. B. 3., 43.

¹⁰⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 350.

¹⁰⁹ George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), 182.

¹¹⁰ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 76.

¹¹¹ See Westmoreland’s description of HOP TAC in his book entitled, *A Soldier Reports*, 82-85.

¹¹² Ibid., 101.

war game predicted correctly that the American public would rather pull out of Vietnam than commit to a protracted war.¹¹⁴ Despite the lessons of the exercise, the Johnson administration continued to push for increased military assistance and air strikes. In December 1964, President Johnson approved phase one of OPLAN-37, which increased American air operations in the Laotian panhandle and continued reprisal bombings for major Vietcong attacks.¹¹⁵

By 1965, the situation in the RVN had reached critical mass and required a change in strategy due to the same problems as before: increased Vietcong resistance, problems with the ARVN, and continuous political instability within the RVN government. Johnson informed Ambassador Taylor, “I have never felt that this war will be won from the air, and it seems to me that what is much more needed and would be more effective is a larger and stronger use of rangers and special forces and marines. . . . I myself am ready to substantially increase the number of Americans in Vietnam.”¹¹⁶ Ambassador Taylor consistently expressed “grave reservations” about using Marines in the jungles of Asia because they would make the RVN government more dependent on American aid, and because they were not trained in guerilla tactics.¹¹⁷

Within a year, Taylor informed President Johnson that the RVN regime was “hopeless,” and that one of the many factions would eventually make a deal with the Communists.¹¹⁸ He provided Johnson with two alternatives: deploy combat troops or increase the bombing of the DRVNN.¹¹⁹ Johnson wavered with the decision and compared his situation to standing on a large newspaper in the middle of the “sea of Vietnam”: “If I go this way, I’ll topple over, and if I go this way I’ll topple over, and if I stay where I am, the paper will be soaked up and I’ll sink away slowly to the bottom of the sea.”¹²⁰ Johnson’s indecisiveness ended when the events of 6 February 1965 forced

¹¹³ McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 142.

¹¹⁴ See the discussion of SIGMA war games in Karnow’s, *Vietnam: A History*, 415, and McMasters’s, *Dereliction of Duty*, 158.

¹¹⁵ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 113.

¹¹⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 425.

¹¹⁷ Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam*, 138.

¹¹⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 425.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 425.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 426.

him to show his hand and further increased the friction between global and theater-military domains.

On that date, Vietcong forces attacked a United States base in the central highlands near Pleiku. In retaliation, Johnson authorized naval strike aircraft to bomb a DRVN army camp under the code name Operation Flaming Dart. At the same time bombs were falling, Aleksei Kosygin, the new Soviet Prime Minister, was in Hanoi to urge Ho Chi Minh to negotiate with the United States. Some speculate that Ho deliberately timed the Pleiku attack in the hope that the United States would retaliate during Kosygin's visit. Regardless of the validity of this speculation, Kosygin sent Hanoi surface-to-air missiles within ten days of his arrival back in the Soviet Union.¹²¹ The attack at Pleiku also set the troop train in motion; and by the year's end, nearly 200,000 American troops would occupy the RVN.

Momentum had also begun to build in the air when the President, on 2 March, authorized Operation Rolling Thunder—an eight-week plan that lasted over three years. Within a month, however, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle Wheeler told McNamara that the strikes had not reduced the DRVN's military capabilities or seriously damaged its economy.¹²² When Rolling Thunder failed to produce the anticipated "miracle," the President sent Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson to the RVN "to get some answers."¹²³ General Johnson informed General Westmoreland that the President had signed a blank check to win the war and "to assume no limitation on funds, equipment or personnel."¹²⁴ Johnson was willing to try anything to keep from losing. If the friction among domains was high before 28 July 1965, the introduction of combat ground troops only made it worse.

¹²¹ See details concerning Kosygin's visit in Karnow's, *Vietnam: A History*, 429.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 430.

¹²³ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 140

¹²⁴ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 140, and Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 432. Secretary of Defense McNamara sent a memorandum to all services stating "I want it clearly understood that there is an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. Under no circumstances is lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation."

Friction and Resolution between Global and Domestic Domains

The differences and tension between global and domestic domains troubled Johnson from the start—without having to add the theater-military domain to the fire. Johnson once stated, “Losing the Great Society was a terrible thought, but not so terrible as the thought of being responsible for America’s losing the war to the Communists. Nothing would be worse than that.”¹²⁵ Johnson made it clear the amount of pressure he was feeling between satisfying global and domestic imperatives when he stated

I knew from the start that I was bound to be crucified either way I moved. If I left the woman I really loved—the Great Society—in order to get involved with that bitch of a war on the other side of the world, then I would lose everything at home. . . . But if I left that war and let the Communists take over South Vietnam, then I would be seen as a coward and my nation would be seen as an appeaser.¹²⁶

The decision to commit forty-four battalions of ground combat troops in July 1965, however, did not seriously impede Johnson’s ability to pass legislation for his Great Society in 1964 or the spring of 1965. Ultimately in 1968, when forced to choose between guns and butter, Johnson chose butter. In 1965, however, President Johnson had time on his side and was able to use his uncanny political skills to “ram” legislation for his Great Society through Congress *before* Vietnam entered the public spotlight.¹²⁷ Johnson learned at an early age that war had a significant influence on social programs. At the age of five, Johnson heard his populist grandfather describe how the Spanish-American War had affected social reform; and he experienced first-hand how wars had sidetracked Populism, Progressivism, and the New and Fair Deals.¹²⁸ Johnson knew that time was of the essence when he said, “No matter what your mandate is you have one year, and you’ve got to get everything done in that year.”¹²⁹

Johnson used his time and legislative skills wisely and made every effort to hide the Vietnam buildup to prevent congressional distraction from his Great Society

¹²⁵ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 259.

¹²⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 336.

¹²⁷ See description of President Johnson’s legislative prowess in Kearns’s, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 227.

¹²⁸ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 259 and Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 278.

¹²⁹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 279.

legislation. According to George C. Herring, “He took the nation to war so quietly, with such consummate skill that when things turned sour the anger was inevitably directed at him.”¹³⁰ Johnson had learned as a Senator to move in contradictory directions and keep his dealings with one group secret from the others. The President told Doris Kearns

I was determined to keep the war from shattering [the Great Society]. . . . I knew the Congress as well as I knew Lady Bird, and I knew that the day it exploded into a major debate on the war, that day would be the beginning of the end of the Great Society. . . . I wanted both, I believed in both, and I believed America had the resources to provide both.¹³¹

Johnson kept the troop buildup as quiet as possible until October 1965. Once the new fiscal year began, Johnson’s social reforms would take root; and he could direct more attention and money to Vietnam. Johnson was aware that some of his programs would not get the full funding they required, but within two years, he would no longer be able to juggle “his wife and mistress.”

Despite his attempts to hide the Vietnam War from the American public, Johnson sensed a negative shift in political and public support in late 1964 and early 1965. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, a good friend and supporter of Johnson, said, “The time has come to reevaluate our position in Vietnam”; and a correspondent for the *New York Times* wrote, “The time has come to call a spade a bloody shovel. This country is in an undeclared and unexplained war in Vietnam.”¹³² Despite these exceptions, Johnson’s “butter” portion of the “guns and butter” strategy caused little friction at home or abroad in the summer of 1965. The same can not be said about the differences and friction between global and theater-military domains.

Friction and Lack of Resolution between Global and Theater-Military Domains

If tension existed between domestic and global domains, it was light in comparison to the anxiety and strain created by the differences between global and theater-military domains. Although dissenting views aggravated Johnson, tension existed within his administration. Perhaps the “foremost partisan of prudence” and the only

¹³⁰ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 185.

¹³¹ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 282-283.

¹³² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 429.

person within the administration who consistently suggested that a war in Vietnam would undermine America's global credibility was Under Secretary of State George Ball.¹³³ Ball was a liberal New Deal lawyer who had been a member of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey that observed the effects of the Allied bombing of Germany after World War II. The lessons he drew from that experience convinced him that bombing the jungles of Vietnam would be totally ineffective. In addition, Ball, as a member of the Kennedy administration, spoke frequently with Charles de Gaulle, who warned him that America was on the verge of making the same mistakes the French had made ten years earlier. After Ball warned President Kennedy that Vietnam might one day require 300,000 troops, the President replied, "Well, George, you're supposed to be one of the smartest guys in town, but you're crazier than hell. That will never happen."¹³⁴

Ball went against the trend in American foreign relations by suggesting a renewed focus on Europe. In early October 1964, Ball wrote a sixty-seven-page memorandum entitled, "A Challenge to the Assumptions of our Current Vietnam Policy." Among other things, Ball's memorandum argued that an air offensive against the DRVN would induce escalation, an American presence could not substitute for an effective RVN government, and that China might intervene directly—causing nuclear war. Therefore, Ball suggested a prompt withdrawal before the United States lost too much credibility and influence in Europe and around the world. Johnson, after discussing Ball's suggestions with other cabinet members, stated, "I felt the Under Secretary had not produced a sufficiently convincing case or a viable alternative."¹³⁵ There were other dissenters within the beltway such as Robert Kennedy and Paul Kattenburg; but like Ball, their suggestions did not represent *acceptable* alternatives to what the Johnson administration was doing.¹³⁶

Tension began to mount in theater between Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland concerning the best ground strategy to adopt. After the Pleiku attack, Ambassador Taylor reluctantly accepted General Westmoreland's request for two marine

¹³³ The following account of George Ball comes from Karnow's, *Vietnam: A History*, 420-421 and Johnson's, *The Vantage Point*, 147.

¹³⁴ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 266.

¹³⁵ Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 147.

battalions, consisting of 3,500 men, to protect Danang airfield from the six thousand Vietcong in the vicinity. On 8 March, the marines arrived, but Ambassador Taylor said, “if you brought that first battalion of Marines ashore at Da Nang, you’re starting something that God only knows where it’s going to stop.”¹³⁷ Disregarding a report released by the United States Information Agency in February 1965 that indicated the RVN population was largely apathetic and showed significant approval for the Vietcong, McNamara gave Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs a green light to “do anything that will strengthen the position of the [RVN].”¹³⁸ Westmoreland requested additional combat troops to begin “search and destroy” missions in the central highlands to demonstrate that the United States was ready to respond to the Communists’ transition into Mao Zedong’s phase-three, “big-unit war.”¹³⁹ In response to McNamara’s statement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a massive deployment of air, land, and sea forces to the RVN in the hopes that the conflict would develop along conventional lines.¹⁴⁰

Ambassador Taylor, on the other hand, continued to defend a more limited objective of merely securing several key coastal enclaves and strongly urged President Johnson not to send more troops to the RVN and not to authorize the commencement of offensive operations. To Westmoreland, the enclave strategy clashed with Army doctrine and represented “an inglorious, static use of United States forces. . . . that would leave the decision of where and when to strike to the enemy.”¹⁴¹ President Johnson sided with General Westmoreland, leading Ambassador Taylor to believe that Johnson’s air campaign had “crossed the Rubicon” and now “he was now off to Rome on the double.”¹⁴² On 1 April 1965, the President sent Westmoreland two additional marine battalions and eighteen to twenty thousand logistical troops to bring the fight to the Vietcong. By mid-June, however, the Vietcong had nearly decimated the ARVN. In response, General Westmoreland requested an additional 180,000 American soldiers to

¹³⁶ Richard K. Betts and Leslie Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1979), 352.

¹³⁷ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 138.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 139.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 141.

serve as a “stopgap” to avert imminent catastrophe. He told Johnson, “We are in for the long pull. I see no likelihood of achieving a quick, favorable end to the war.”¹⁴³ Johnson could comply either with Westmoreland’s request or, in his eyes, face defeat. The following citation provides insight to the dilemma confronting Johnson

I knew that if we let Communist aggression succeed in taking over South Vietnam, there would follow in this country an endless national debate—a mean and destructive debate—that would shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy.¹⁴⁴

On 28 July, President Johnson told the American public “I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. And we will meet his needs. We cannot be defeated by force of arms. We will stand in Vietnam.”¹⁴⁵ Given the circumstances, this may have been the only acceptable alternative, but this decision would result in numerous short and long-term consequences that are still being felt today.

Consequences of Resolution or Lack Thereof

From a theater-military perspective, the decision to commit American ground combat troops in July of 1965 did not necessarily lead to the deployment of over 500,000 men in country, seven long years of war, over 58,000 Americans killed in action, and the “Vietnam Syndrome”; but it was sufficient to start the momentum.¹⁴⁶ The consequences that resulted from the many events and decisions made after July 1965 were due as much to the failure to recognize a strategy gone bad and sticking with it than they were the result of a bad initial strategic decision.

From a domestic standpoint, the Vietnam War prevented the Great Society from reaching its full potential; but Johnson’s ability to pass legislation during the early days of the war paved the way for lasting social reform in several areas, including civil rights

¹⁴² Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 435.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 438.

¹⁴⁴ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 252.

¹⁴⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 441.

¹⁴⁶ US casualty information was derived from the Combat Area Casualty File of November 1993, and The Adjutant General’s Center (TAGCEN) file of 1981, available from the National Archives. For more information, see “Casualties- US vs NVA/VC”, n.p.; on-line, Internet, 17 April 2001, available from http://www.rjsmith.com/kia_tbl.html.

and programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.¹⁴⁷ Johnson's Great Society had its share of administrative, economic, and social problems; but in general, it had a "humanizing force" behind it that "helped advance the national well-being and fulfill the promise of American life."¹⁴⁸ Subsequent escalation decisions after July 1965 that were accompanied by little meaningful progress in the war effort caused domestic divisiveness and an overall mistrust in the government—not to mention a broken image of Johnson and a change in administrations in 1968.

America's consensus about its global position post World War II, which had withstood even the test of Korea, was shattered after Vietnam. Robert Dallek called the Vietnam War "a morass" and "the worst foreign policy disaster in the country's history."¹⁴⁹ President George Bush stated after Operation Desert Storm "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all"; but an argument can be made that like a bad virus, Vietnam is just waiting for the right political, military, and geographical conditions to reveal itself again.¹⁵⁰

Underlying Reasons for Lack of Resolution

There were so many underlying reasons for the dilemma of Vietnam that an attempt to codify them in a single section of a single chapter cannot be definitive. It may be that resolution was impossible given the Johnson administration's unwavering belief that communism had to be stopped in Vietnam. Some have argued that American foreign policy failed in Vietnam, but that the political-bureaucratic system worked because Johnson compromised between extreme choices to prevent the RVN from falling to the Communists until 1975.¹⁵¹ For the purposes of this study, the eccentricities of President Johnson's personality and leadership style, the inappropriate military strategy given the lethal nature of the terrain and enemy, and the instability of the RVN government top the list. According to George C. Herring, "Abysmal ignorance of Vietnam and the Vietnamese on the part of Lyndon Johnson, his advisors, and the nation as a whole

¹⁴⁷ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 625.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 625.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 626.

¹⁵⁰ Richard J. Newman, "Vietnam's Forgotten Lessons," *U.S. News*, 5 January 2000, coverstory.

¹⁵¹ Betts and Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 2-4.

thickened the fog of war, contributing to a mistaken decision to intervene, mismanagement of the conflict, and ultimate failure.”¹⁵²

Johnson is not to blame for the Vietnam dilemma. His personality and leadership style, however apt for the legislature, made him the wrong executive in charge of guiding foreign policy in Vietnam. Johnson was only the second man in the twentieth century to succeed an assassinated president; and he was not exactly a Teddy Roosevelt, nor was William McKinley a John Kennedy. After John F. Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson considered himself a “man in trouble”; and to insiders, he was notably insecure about himself and his ability to lead the country.¹⁵³

Johnson’s leadership style was characterized by obsessive secrecy, paranoia, giving everybody something but nobody everything they wanted, consensus and internal harmony over actual results, military narrow-mindedness, and intolerance for dissent.¹⁵⁴ Johnson was notorious for using his dominating personality, stature, and position of power to control others.¹⁵⁵ Johnson had a desire to be in complete control at all times, including micromanaging the military at the tactical level of warfare. Johnson, a firm believer in Georges Clemenceau’s idea that wars are too important to be left to generals, once boasted that American airmen could not bomb an outhouse without his permission.¹⁵⁶ He was a master politician, but he failed to provide a coherent strategy or firm strategic guidance to the senior political and military leaders in the field.¹⁵⁷ Without clear direction from above, the military and civilian bureaucracies implemented their own improvised strategies “without careful calculation of the ends to be sought and the means used to attain them.”¹⁵⁸

Many scholars have criticized Johnson for being irrational and paranoid concerning the likelihood of Soviet and/or Chinese intervention. Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev did write a personal letter to the President stating that following “aggressive

¹⁵² Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 184.

¹⁵³ See discussion concerning presidential transitions and Johnson’s quote in Dallek’s, *Flawed Giant*, 54.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 181-185.

¹⁵⁵ See the story of Johnson forcing aides to swim in the nude in Kearns’s, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 241, and see the story of how Johnson would wear his dressing gown and carry his flashlight to the situation room in Karnow’s, *Vietnam: A History*, 338.

¹⁵⁶ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 342, and Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 181.

¹⁵⁷ Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 184.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

policies, such as those recommended by Generals [Wallace] Greene and [Curtis] Lemay, could lead, in the worst-case scenario, to nuclear war.”¹⁵⁹ What constitutes a worst-case scenario is debatable, but it is interesting to note that Johnson received the letter five months *after* he approved McNamara’s gradual response strategy. Doris Kearns suggests that Johnson’s paranoia caused him to live in constant fear of tripping some imaginary wire that might set World War III into motion.¹⁶⁰ The President stated, “I never knew as I sat there in the afternoon, approving targets one, two, and three, whether one of those three might just be the one to set off the provisions of those secret treaties. . . . What if one of those targets . . . triggers off Russia or China?”¹⁶¹ Kearns argues that Johnson’s own need to believe was the only basis for such concerns and that “magnifying the stakes” was the only way he could justify his bizarre actions.¹⁶² Robert Dallek suggests that Johnson’s paranoia raises questions about his ability to make rational life-and-death decisions and that no one should make light of how his suspicions and anger toward his critics distorted his judgment when it came to making decisions concerning Vietnam.¹⁶³

It is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a balanced strategy when senior political and military leaders do not understand the nature of the conflict or the enemy. The Vietnamese spent almost sixteen hundred years trying to gain their independence from China; and once they got it, they enjoyed only two hundred years of autonomous government without Western influence. Perhaps they were tired of being “invaded” by the French, Japanese, and Americans. It is no wonder the United States Information Agency report briefed to the Johnson administration in February 1965 stated that the people of the RVN did not care which side won, but that they favored the Vietcong—who were interested in unifying the indigenous people of Vietnam.¹⁶⁴ President Johnson could not conceive of the notion that foreign leaders from that “damn

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 159-160. See 5 August 1964 letter in *Foreign Relations of the United States, Vietnam 1964-1968*. Vol. 1, *Vietnam 1964* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992-96), 636-38.

¹⁶⁰ Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, 270.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 270.

¹⁶² Ibid., 270.

¹⁶³ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 54.

¹⁶⁴ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 139.

little pissant country” could not be haggled like American politicians, businessmen, and labor negotiators.¹⁶⁵ Johnson simply did not understand the country or its people.

From a military perspective, General Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs of Staff never fully realized that an insurgency required a different mode of warfare. In July 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Westmoreland failed to comprehend that a conventional strategy based on attrition was an expensive way to buy time for the RVN government and would not reduce casualties or wear down the enemy.¹⁶⁶ Senior political and military leaders mistakenly assumed that bombing the DRVN and fighting the Vietcong in the central highlands of the RVN would somehow build domestic support for the unstable RVN government. On the contrary, General Westmoreland’s “search and destroy” strategy alienated “the most important element in any counterinsurgency strategy—the people.”¹⁶⁷ Bombing the DRVN and leaving the peasants to their own devices did not extinguish Vietnamese nationalism, nor was it able to strengthen the RVN government. The Vietcong consistently demonstrated both the willingness and ability to accept significant losses, and the people of the RVN had little if no incentive to fight the Vietcong when “the big boy on the block” would do it for them.

The lack of competent leadership within the RVN government was a major reason why tension between global and theater-military domains was never resolved. Johnson may have been fed up with “this coup shit,” but not one of the numerous members of the RVN “ruler of the month” club that his administration supported had the skills necessary to run a government or a military.¹⁶⁸ Without a stable government capable of providing security to its citizens, the people of the RVN were extremely vulnerable to Vietcong influence. With each coup d’état and subsequent transition, the government’s authority, influence, and ability to defeat the Vietcong on the battlefield dwindled.

Conclusion

Riding the crest of his triumphant bid for the White House, President Johnson secured a majority of the legislation for his Great Society and was ready to make his

¹⁶⁵ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 337, 441.

¹⁶⁶ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 259.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 259.

mark abroad in the summer of 1965. However, the situation in Vietnam was far different from anything he had experienced during his thirty-two years in public office—perhaps different from anything the United States had experienced or would experience in the future. Although there might not have been a viable solution, Johnson did not develop or provide a clear strategy to link the chosen theater-military means with the global ends desired. To secure an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam would require a patient, long-term counterinsurgency strategy and a strong and stable government—neither of which existed.¹⁶⁹

The geography of the region and nature of the enemy, coupled with Johnson's inappropriate restrictions and micromanaging approach, precluded the use of airpower from stopping Communist infiltration into the RVN. Taking the fight to the DRVN might have been appropriate during World War II or Korea, and the Army's most "comfortable" way to fight a war, but solving an insurgency problem along conventional lines was like operating on the foot to repair a defective heart. Westmoreland's "take" on the war was wrong, and President Johnson bought it. The global strategy to prevent communism in South Vietnam could probably have lived with forty-four battalions, but it could not survive with a failed effort when nearly 600,000 troops were committed.

Chance brought together some of the finest leaders ever assembled during the decision to implement Operation Torch during World War II. However, chance also brought men such as Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, William Westmoreland, and the "Whiz Kids" together to solve perhaps an unsolvable problem. Johnson's decision to back a flawed theater strategy made it impossible to formulate a balanced strategy. In the words of Kenny Rogers's song "The Gambler", President Johnson might have "known when to hold 'em" in July 1965; but once the costs clearly outweighed the benefits—sometime after 1965—Johnson did not "know when to fold 'em."¹⁷⁰

It would behoove future strategists to learn from the mistakes committed during the Vietnam War. No one tried to lose the Vietnam war; but the political leaders put too much emphasis on the global leg of the strategic stool, the theater commanders provided

¹⁶⁸ Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 350.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 394.

a fractured leg, and no matter how strong the domestic leg of the stool was, it had no chance of creating the stability required to allow someone to sit without crashing to the ground. Perhaps if the military strategy is flawed (as it was), it becomes impossible to develop a coherent strategy, even if the other two are solid.

¹⁷⁰ Lyrics from Kenny Rogers's song entitled "The Gambler," n.p.; on-line, Internet, 18 April 2001, available from http://bbdm.homestead.com/kr_tg.html.

CHAPTER 4

DESERT STORM: A BRIDGE TOO NEAR¹⁷¹

One hundred hours has a nice ring.

— Norman Schwarzkopf

Introduction

President George Bush's decision to enact a cease-fire at 0800¹⁷² on 28 February 1991 ended a five-week air campaign and a one hundred-hour ground offensive. The coalition accomplished the great majority of its strategic objectives but, with the benefit of hindsight, failed to achieve one of its theater-military objectives. This led to several short and long-term global consequences that are still being felt today. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the ability of senior political and military leaders to reconcile the differences among global, domestic, and theater-military domains in what was termed "The New World Order" at the end of the Cold War.

Global Domain

The global imperatives that influenced President Bush's decision to enact a cease-fire were to ensure stability within the Gulf region and for the United States to emerge from its first test as the world's only superpower with its global prestige intact. The following background information explains the origin of these imperatives and why President Bush elected to use military means to achieve his global objectives.

The geopolitical structure of the world had changed drastically ten months after President Bush took office in January 1989. Although only a few frames in the film of

¹⁷¹ The name of this chapter is a play on Cornelius Ryan's book entitled, *A Bridge Too Far* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974, paperback 1995), which describes how the Allied plan to seize the bridge at Arnhem, Holland attempted to go one bridge too far.

¹⁷² All times are Riyadh local unless noted otherwise. Washington D.C. was eight time zones behind Riyadh time.

history, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 signified freedom for Eastern Europe, the end to a mortal threat to the United States, and the rise of America as the world's only superpower.¹⁷³ Faced with a new order, the Bush administration began to react to the dynamic situation in Europe, which included the reunification of Germany, the turmoil in the Soviet Republics, and arms control talks with the Soviet Union. However, an opportunity to assume the primary leadership role as the world's hegemon presented itself when three Iraqi Republican Guard divisions invaded Kuwait at 0200 on 2 August 1990. Although President Bush said he "found it hard to believe that Saddam would invade," his administration began to see the Iraqi invasion as its first test in a new strategic environment.¹⁷⁴ With the Soviet Union essentially out of the picture due to internal difficulties, the United States used the atrocities committed by the Iraqis in Kuwait as a rationale for forming an international coalition against Saddam Hussein.¹⁷⁵ Within a day of the invasion, the United Nations had voted in favor of Resolution 660, which demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait and that the dispute be resolved by peaceful negotiations. Saddam refused to leave; therefore, in mid-October, Secretary of State James Baker began to formulate a United Nations resolution that would authorize the use of military force to achieve the previous objectives.

At the same time, President Bush's National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, asked his staff and the Deputies Committee to determine recommendations for possible war aims and a desired end-state.¹⁷⁶ Scowcroft's team recommended an indirect strategy to remove Hussein from power by relying on the people of Iraq to do the work from within. They recommended reducing his military to a defensive force that was still capable of preserving a balance with Iran, but determined that Hussein's source of power was his elite divisions of the Republican Guard and that their destruction was crucial to ending his control of Iraq. According to Scowcroft, "Our Arab allies were convinced, and we began to assume, that dealing Saddam another battlefield defeat would shatter

¹⁷³ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), xii.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 400. Also, see the numerous warnings that Charlie Allen and Walter Lang provided the Bush administration in Chapter One of Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor's, *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 3-30.

¹⁷⁵ See a description of the atrocities committed by the Iraqis and the emotional response it elicited in President Bush in Bush and Scowcroft's, *A World Transformed*, 374, 410, 427, and 479.

what support he had within the military, which probably would then topple him.”¹⁷⁷ President Bush stated

I just keep thinking the Iraqi people ought to take care of [him] with the Iraqi military. . . . But it seems to me that the more suffering the people of Iraq go through, the more likely it is that somebody will stand up and do that which should have been done a long time ago—take that guy out of there—either kick him out of the country or do something where he is no longer running things.¹⁷⁸

Scowcroft’s committee discussed removing Saddam from power directly; but they concluded that assassination went against United Nations resolutions, would split the coalition, was not a legal option, and it would be difficult to do with air strikes. They also believed that a replacement would have to be installed requiring “some dubious nation-building” and an indefinite occupation of a hostile nation.¹⁷⁹ These assumptions are perhaps debatable, but they drove the Bush administration to do as much damage as possible to the Iraqi military and wait for the Ba’ath party to collapse. President Bush agreed with the Committee’s recommendations and stated in his memoirs

I firmly believed that we should not march to Baghdad. Our stated mission, as codified in United Nations resolutions, was a simple one—end the aggression, knock Iraq’s forces out of Kuwait, and restore Kuwait’s leaders. To occupy Iraq would instantly shatter our coalition, turning the whole Arab world against us, and make a broken tyrant into a latter-day Arab hero. . . . It could only plunge that part of the world into even greater instability and destroy the credibility we were working so hard to reestablish. Should Saddam survive the war, I did think we could at least attempt to ensure that his military might was diminished or destroyed. This was behind my concern that he might withdraw from Kuwait before we had managed to grind down his armor and heavy equipment.¹⁸⁰

On 29 November, the United Nations Security Council voted in favor of Resolution 678, which set a 15 January deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait and authorized “all member states . . . to use all necessary means to uphold and implement [all resolutions] and

¹⁷⁶ These recommendations became the guidelines for Central Command’s military objectives.

¹⁷⁷ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 433.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 464.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 433.

restore international peace and security to the area.”¹⁸¹ In his 29 January State of the Union Address, President Bush outlined the coalition’s objectives: “to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, to restore Kuwait’s legitimate government, and to ensure the stability and security of the region.”¹⁸² “Marching to Baghdad” or “taking [Saddam] out” were not politically viable options.¹⁸³

Domestic Domain

The domestic battles fought within the Beltway during Operation Desert Shield had been bloodier in many respects than the war itself; but by the time a cease-fire was being considered, they had taken a back seat to the war being televised on Cable News Network (CNN).¹⁸⁴ It was imperative for President Bush to finish the war strong in order to retain domestic support for his future policies and pave the way for a second presidential term. Although not a significant factor in the decision to stop the war, background information is essential to understand why the Bush administration feared a possible backlash from Congress and the American public.

When the Iraqis invaded Kuwait, the Bush administration was battling an economic recession and a nasty partisan budget debate. Getting the world to condemn Saddam Hussein and building a coalition consisting of thirty different countries was relatively easy compared to the domestic struggle President Bush faced with a Congress controlled by Democrats. During the 1988 Republican national convention, then Vice President Bush had made the famous statement, “Read my lips, no new taxes”; and although this was his intention at the time, he introduced a compromise budget in October 1990 that in fact raised taxes. Bush blamed the increase on the imperative to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 464.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 414.

¹⁸² Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Security and Science’s, *The Persian Gulf Crisis: Relevant Documents, Correspondence, Reports* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), 207.

¹⁸³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 464.

¹⁸⁴ It is interesting to note how quickly previous dissenters in Congress jumped on the bandwagon as soon as Operation Desert Storm appeared to be successful. Within two days, both the Senate and House passed resolutions commending the President’s leadership in the Persian Gulf Crisis. Senate: 98 to 0 in favor;

keep the government functional; but, in his own words, he “paid a terrible price.”¹⁸⁵ The House of Representatives backed the Bush administration’s initial troop deployment to the Gulf by passing a non-binding resolution on 1 October, but it defeated the Bush budget four days later after Republican Congressman Newt Gingrich backed away at the last minute from a compromise to which he had previously agreed.¹⁸⁶

Besides the budget battle, the Bush administration felt considerable congressional pressure concerning the constitutionality of using military force against Iraq. On 30 October, the Democratic Speaker of the House, Tom Foley, handed President Bush an “expression of concern” signed by eighty-one Democratic leaders that outlined their opposition to war and their concerns that 10,000-50,000 Americans would die in the Iraqi desert.¹⁸⁷ In late November, Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, called several retired senior political and military leaders, including Henry Kissinger, Admiral William Crowe, James Schlesinger, and James Webb to testify about the possible use of economic sanctions and the state of military readiness. In the end, only Kissinger advocated the use of military force.¹⁸⁸ Even the President’s own chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, and theater Commander-in-Chief, General Norman Schwarzkopf, argued that sanctions should be given time to work. Powell believed that “Saudi Arabia [should be] the line,” and Schwarzkopf told the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, “Now we are starting to see evidence that the sanctions are pinching, so why should we say, ‘Okay, gave ‘em two months, didn’t work. Let’s get on with it and kill a whole bunch of people?’ That’s crazy.”¹⁸⁹ In December 1990, Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii told the President, “Do what you have to do. If it is quick and successful everyone can take the credit. If it is drawn out, then be prepared for some in Congress to file impeachment papers against you.”¹⁹⁰

House: 399 to 6 in favor, with 6 answering “present.” Information from, Subcommittee on Arms Control, *The Persian Gulf Crisis*, 212.

¹⁸⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 380.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 380.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 389.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 417.

¹⁸⁹ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 33, 149.

¹⁹⁰ George Bush, *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1999), 498.

8 November signified a turning point when President Bush announced that the United States would send additional forces to the Gulf with the intent to conduct offensive operations.¹⁹¹ On 12 January, Congress voted to authorize the President to use military force to implement United Nations Resolution 678; although, the entire Democratic leadership in both the House and Senate opposed the resolution.¹⁹² Four days later, President Bush informed Congress in writing that he would use military force in Kuwait because all diplomatic efforts had failed.¹⁹³

Theater-Military Domain

The theater-military imperative that influenced President Bush's decision to enact a cease-fire was the destruction of the Republican Guard—Saddam Hussein's source of power whose destruction would "probably"¹⁹⁴ cause his overthrow. The following summary of events that led to the cease-fire reveals how the coalition was able to achieve its first two objectives but went a "bridge too near" when it came to destroying the Republican Guard and restoring stability within the region.

After the political objectives had been set and the diplomatic efforts failed to satisfy United Nations Resolution 678, President Bush left the war largely to the generals to win or lose.¹⁹⁵ President Bush, not unlike President John F. Kennedy, had served with distinction in WW II's Pacific theater, had graduated from an Ivy League school, and possessed an above average intellect. As a freshman congressman in 1966, Bush had paid his own way to Southeast Asia to "get a feel for the war." After mingling with the troops and joining them for sixteen days, Bush had gained a deep admiration for the American servicemen and developed a dislike for those who complained about the "military mind."¹⁹⁶ The time Bush spent as an aviator in World War II and his experience as an observer in the jungles of Vietnam forged his outlook on civil-military

¹⁹¹ *Final Report to Congress: Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 1992), 65.

¹⁹² See Public Law 102-1, authorization for the use of force pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 in, Subcommittee on Arms Control, *The Persian Gulf Crisis*, 1-2.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁹⁴ See Scowcroft's statement in Bush and Scowcroft's, *A World Transformed*, 433.

¹⁹⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *The General's War*, x.

relations. Bush stated in his memoirs, “I have not second-guessed; I have not told them what targets to hit; I have not told them how much ordinance to use or how much not to use, or what weapons to use and not to use. I have learned from Vietnam, and I think the Army and the other services are doing a superb job.”¹⁹⁷ General Schwarzkopf recalled after a telephone conversation with the President

As I hung up the phone, I was struck by what the President had chosen *not* to say: he’d given me no orders and hadn’t second-guessed the decisions I’d made, and the detailed questions he’d asked had been purely for clarification. His confidence in the military’s ability to do its job was so unlike what we’d seen in Vietnam that the conversation meant the world to me.¹⁹⁸

Armed with a domestic and international mandate, President Bush authorized Operation Desert Storm to begin at 0130 on 17 January 1991. Desert Storm was the first war dominated by the joint use of airpower. Joint, in the context of the Persian Gulf War, however, did not always imply integration. This was because the services were given the opportunity to conduct their own kind of warfare under the supervision of General Powell and Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney.¹⁹⁹ For this reason, friction developed within and among all services and between the thirty members of the coalition before and after the ground offensive began. Despite the differences, coalition aircraft, without question, had weakened the Iraqi resistance and made it easier for ground forces to accomplish their mission.

Political factors shaped the battlefield several times during the conflict. On 17 January, Iraq launched six SCUD missiles at Israel in an apparent attempt to disrupt the coalition. The SCUD attacks continued; but effective diplomacy, the delivery of two

¹⁹⁶ Herbert S. Parmet, *George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee* (New York, NY: A Lisa Drew Book/Scribner, 1997), 128.

¹⁹⁷ Bush, *All the Best*, 511.

¹⁹⁸ Norman H. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero* (New York, NY: Linda Grey Bantam Books, 1992), 460.

¹⁹⁹ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, xi.

PATRIOT missile batteries to Israel, and the apportionment of dedicated air assets to “SCUD hunting” missions countered Saddam’s strategy and helped persuade the Israelis not to enter the war. Another incident that produced political and military ramifications was the 13 February F-117/A attack on the Al Firdos command and control bunker in Baghdad. American intelligence had concluded that the bunker should be destroyed because the Iraqi Intelligence Service was using the facility to eliminate internal dissent. Over one hundred civilians who had been allowed to stay in the shelter were killed; and when the incident made the headlines on CNN, General Powell took control of all targeting in Baghdad. Powell stated, “After something like this, we did not need another situation where a large number of civilians were killed with Peter Arnett all over the place. We were a month into the war and our concentration was shifting to the battlefield.”²⁰⁰ The timing of the ground offensive was influenced as much, if not more, by political factors than it was by military concerns. President Bush had pressured General Powell and General Schwarzkopf to begin the ground offensive at the earliest possible date before a Soviet/Iraq peace proposal could reach the United Nations Security Council.²⁰¹ It was not a coincidence that on 22 February, President Bush formally announced that Iraq had until 2000 on 23 February to start leaving Kuwait—the 22nd being the same day the last elements of XVIII (Abn) Corps had arrived in theater.²⁰²

Schwarzkopf’s plan for the ground offensive resembled a mirror image of the original World War I Schlieffen Plan. Both plans required relatively slow or counter movement from a weaker force opposite the pivot point to pin the enemy down, while the stronger main attack enveloped the adversary from behind. General Schwarzkopf’s pinning force consisted of two Marine divisions that would push into southern Kuwait a day before the main Army attack to deceive the Iraqis into believing that the main

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 327.

²⁰¹ On 18 February, Gorbachev met with Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz in Moscow to discuss a four-point peace plan. President Bush rejected the peace plan on the following day because it would have prevented the destruction of the Republican Guard—one of the Coalition’s main objectives. On 21 February, Aziz formally agreed to the Soviet peace proposal, and Gorbachev spent ninety minutes on the telephone with President Bush in an attempt to halt the ground offensive to allow more time for negotiations. See the discussion in Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*, 334 and, Subcommittee on Arms Control Report, *The Persian Gulf Crisis*, 196-7.

²⁰² Subcommittee on Arms Control Report, *The Persian Gulf Crisis*, 195.

coalition effort would come from the east.²⁰³ It was believed that when the Iraqis committed their main effort south to counter the Marine offensive, the two-corps “left hook” from the west would cut down the Republican Guard like a “giant scythe.”²⁰⁴

From an operational standpoint, the indications of Iraqi deterioration and ineffectiveness at the battle of Khafji failed to influence General Schwarzkopf’s scheme of maneuver.²⁰⁵ The Army planners assumed the Marines would meet significant resistance in Southern Kuwait, which would give time for the left hook to score a knockout. But according to Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, “It was one of the major miscalculations of the war . . . [and] graphically illustrates [Schwarzkopf’s] failure to appreciate the weakness of the Iraqi’s position and their vulnerability to attack.”²⁰⁶ The 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions, under the leadership of Marine Expeditionary Force commander Lieutenant General Walt Boomer, crossed the Saudi Arabian border at 0400 on 24 February; and although they met resistance, they pushed the enemy north with considerable effect. Similarly, the Germans had changed the original Schlieffen plan by strengthening those opposite the pivot point with forces from the sweeping “right hook.” Neither the German nor the coalition pinning forces did what they were originally designed to do. By the end of the first night, the Marines were well ahead of schedule, which, surprised Schwarzkopf.

In an effort to protect the Marines’ left flank and to keep the Republican Guard from escaping too early, Schwarzkopf ordered Lieutenant General John Yeosock to commence the VII and XVIII (Abn) Corps attacks at 1500 on 24 February, instead of the morning of 25 February. Yeosock, dual-hatted as the commander of Third Army and the Army component of Central Command (ARCENT), had recently recovered from emergency gall bladder surgery and was allowed to stay at Lucky Main Headquarters in Riyadh instead of near the front lines. Lieutenant General Gary Luck’s XVIII (Abn) Corps, utilizing the aggressive leadership of 24th Mechanized Division commander Major General Barry McCaffrey and 101st Airborne Division commander Major General

²⁰³ Marine forces were also postured in the Persian Gulf to deceive the Iraqis into thinking that an amphibious landing would take place in conjunction with the Marine land attack in southern Kuwait. For more information, see Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*, 292-94.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁰⁵ See a description of the battle of Khafji in Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*, 267-288.

Binford Peay, made considerable progress. Lieutenant General Frederick Franks's VII Corps, however, decided to stop as night fell because operations, according to Colonel Stan Cherrie, Frank's chief operations officer, were "getting too hard."²⁰⁷ General Schwarzkopf became furious when he saw the slump in the middle of the situation map created by VII Corps and considered replacing Franks. Instead, Schwarzkopf issued Franks an order to pivot east and destroy the Republican Guard divisions no later than 27 February.

On the morning of 25 February, the 1st Marine Division in the east under Major General James M. Myatt had determined that two Iraqi mechanized brigades were hiding in the burning oil fields of Burqan. Myatt fired a preemptive artillery barrage into the smoke causing the Iraqis to swarm like "a beehive that had been hit with a stick."²⁰⁸ In some of the most intense ground fighting of the war, Myatt's Marines defeated the Iraqis, but not without casualties. By 2000 on the evening of 25 February, most of the Iraqis in Kuwait had begun a retreat to Basra or were headed for coalition prisoner of war camps. Fighter aircraft scrambled to interdict the mass exodus north; and by the morning of 26 February, they had turned Mutlah Ridge into a two-mile long stretch of 1,400 destroyed vehicles and 200 to 300 dead Iraqis.²⁰⁹ The media's coverage of the "highway of death" had a significant impact on General Powell and influenced President Bush's decision to declare a cease-fire two days later.²¹⁰ The Marines reached their goal of Kuwait City in three days, but had to wait outside the city for several hours before the Egyptians arrived to "liberate" the Kuwaitis.²¹¹

In an effort to assist the escape to Basra and prevent the "balled fist" of VII Corps from reaching the fleeing troops to the east, the Iraqis used several brigades to prepare

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 289.

²⁰⁷ See the account of VII Corp's decision to stop for the night and General Schwarzkopf subsequent reaction in Gordon and Trainor's, *The General's War*, 379-81. Also, see Schwarzkopf's version and Powell's telephone conversation concerning Franks in Schwarzkopf's, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 455-63.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 365.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 370.

²¹⁰ Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 468 and Gordon and Trainor's, *The General's War*, 370, 404, 415, 418, .

²¹¹ It is interesting to note that the Marine divisions were ordered to wait for the Egyptians and other Arab contingents to "liberate" the Kuwaitis. The Egyptian Army commander refused to go until President Hosni Murabak ordered his troops to decree officially that Kuwait City had been liberated. See details in Gordon and Trainor's, *The General's War*, 373.

hasty defensive positions east of the Kuwaiti border in the form of a fishhook. Army Captain H.R. McMaster's Eagle Troop and other members of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment fought the dug-in Tawakalna Division of the Republican Guard in the battle of 73 Easting, but the "Mother of All Battles" turned out to be a race to the Euphrates. Senior political and military leaders inside the Beltway thought their theater military commanders had control of the floodgate, but they were mistaken.

Friction and Lack of Resolution between Global and Theater-Military Domains

The domestic battles had abated somewhat after Operation Desert Storm began in mid-January. Anti-war demonstrators continued their drum-beating vigil outside the White House, and approximately 75,000 marchers protested in Washington D.C. on 26 February. But in general, the American public and Congress supported the President and the troops fighting in the Desert. There was an abundance of friction *within* the theater-military domain due to interservice rivalries and competing interests, but the only significant differences *among* domains that required reconciliation occurred between global and theater-military domains. By the morning of 27 February, the military coalition had driven the Iraqis from Kuwait City and provided the security required to help re-establish the legitimate Kuwaiti government. The final objective of providing stability and security within the Gulf region was more difficult to measure, but the Bush administration had determined four months earlier that destroying the Republican Guard was the only feasible option, given the United Nations guidelines.

Saddam Hussein announced by radio at 0100 on 26 February that his forces would leave Kuwait in compliance with United Nations Resolution 660. With the Iraqis in full retreat, President Bush met with his staff to discuss an appropriate response because he was concerned that "the pressure is going to be that as his people are going out, we're still shooting."²¹² Powell, who had talked to Schwarzkopf earlier in the day, informed the President that two more days were required to finish the job. Bush allowed concerns about global prestige to give way to his theater commander's request for more time; and, because Saddam had not "personally and publicly" agreed to the terms of all

²¹² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 482-83.

United Nations resolutions, the President made the decision to continue the war.²¹³ After the meeting, President Bush wrote in his diary

It is my view that Saddam Hussein . . . is trying to put us in a box. He wants to get his troops out . . . and turn world opinion against us . . . We have no evidence that they're quitting, but we're not going to let him bring victory out of the jaws of defeat. . . . The problem is, if he has his forces out of Kuwait, we'll be the ones that are trespassing. . . . We're not going to permit a sloppy ending where this guy emerges saving face. . . . We may take some hits for having our forces in Iraq to stop this; but far worse than that would be if we lost credibility in some silly compromise. I'm not going to do it.²¹⁴

At 1900 on 26 February, General Powell called the President to tell him, “They’re streaming out. . . . The Iraqi army is clearly withdrawing. . . . Don’t worry about the Republican Guard. They’ll be out in a day.”²¹⁵ Why President Bush did not respond with, “I don’t want them *out* in a day. I want them *destroyed* in a day!” is not clear—perhaps he wanted to avoid additional “highways of death” from occurring. On the morning of 27 February, Secretary Cheney eased the President’s worries when he reported that two of three²¹⁶ Republican Guard divisions had been destroyed and only five or six divisions out of the original forty-two were still functioning.²¹⁷ At 1505 on 27 February, Powell told Schwarzkopf on the telephone, “We ought to be talking about a cease-fire. The doves are starting to complain about all the damage you’re doing. The reports make it look like wanton killing.”²¹⁸ Schwarzkopf informed Powell that Yeosock needed one more day to destroy the Republican Guard and told him, “I want the Air Force to keep bombing these convoys backed up at the Euphrates where the bridges are

²¹³ Ibid., 482.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 482-83.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 485.

²¹⁶ Evidence suggests that the Tawakalna, Medina, Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar, Adnan, and Al Faw Republican Guard divisions were still south of Basra. See map of Iraqi retreat in Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*, 388.

blown. I want to continue the ground attack tomorrow, drive to the sea, and totally destroy everything in our path. . . . In one more day we'll be done.”²¹⁹ Schwarzkopf asked Powell, “Do you realize if we go until tomorrow night that will be five days? The five-day war. Does that have a good ring to it?”²²⁰ For Schwarzkopf, a five-day war would have given the United States Army bragging rights over the Israelis, who took six days to defeat the Egyptians in 1967.²²¹

At the same time Schwarzkopf was worrying about the Army’s legacy, the XVIII (Abn) Corps was busy taking the fight to the enemy. By the afternoon of 27 February, the hard-charging McCaffrey was positioned southwest of the Hawr al Hammar bridge to refuel and regroup.²²² After much persuasion, McCaffrey finally received permission from Luck to attack the Iraqis before they reached the Hawr al Hammar bridge—but not until 0500 the following day! Meanwhile, Peay allowed his attack helicopters to engage the retreating Iraqi columns while he waited for final approval to land a brigade north of Basra to cut off the Iraqi retreat before they reached the Euphrates River bridge. Permission for the drop never came because Luck thought it was too aggressive; and, although Schwarzkopf claimed later that he had never heard the proposal and that he never would have approved it, perhaps he should have.²²³ Meanwhile, the “balled fist” of the VII Corps finally caught up to the XVIII (Abn) Corps and engaged the Tawakalna and Medina Republican Guard Divisions in the largest armored engagements of the war. It may have been “a one-sided clay pigeon shoot,”²²⁴ but VII Corps had finally joined

²¹⁷ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 485.

²¹⁸ Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 468.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 469.

²²⁰ Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*, 405.

²²¹ Ibid., 405.

²²² The bridges that spanned the Euphrates had been bombed by coalition aircraft, but the Iraqis were ingenious in their ability to develop alternate methods for crossing the river. See Gordon and Trainor’s account in, *The General’s War*, 411.

²²³ Richard M. Swain, “Lucky War”: *Third Army in Desert Storm* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1997), 281. Also, see Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 407.

²²⁴ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 408.

ranks with the Marine Corps divisions and XVIII Corps to put the final touches on the retreating forces.

Friction among the services occurred throughout the conflict, but few internal battles were more sensitive than how far to extend the fire support coordination line (FSCL) during the Iraqi retreat. Army commanders had authority over the airspace within the FSCL in order to protect their troops from friendly fire. When Luck moved the line north of the Euphrates on the afternoon of 27 February to allow his helicopters unrestricted access to the roads north of Basra, the Joint Force Air Component Commander, Lieutenant General Charles Horner, became furious because the relatively few helicopter sorties prevented fixed-wing assets from engaging the retreating Iraqis for over eight hours. From the Army's point of view, a FSCL too close to their positions the night prior had precluded Apache attack helicopters from creating their own "highway of death." Robert H. Scales opines, "Frustration with the rigidity of the air support system increased as the war of movement began. The 20-grid line restriction imposed by Central Command (CENTCOM) airplanners kept 11th Aviation Brigade helicopters from preventing the escape of Iraqi armor."²²⁵ A similar incident occurred when Franks moved the FSCL east to the Kuwait coastline and north to Basra to protect his rapidly advancing troops, even after his forces became engaged with elements of the Republican Guard. Regardless of who was right or wrong, the coalition failed to close the gate on the retreating Iraqis.²²⁶

On the afternoon of 27 February, the Bush staff met again in the Oval Office to discuss the timing of a cease-fire. Scowcroft was under the impression that Iraq's capability to develop weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed; and Bush, although concerned that America would lose global prestige if it continued to "pour it on" the retreating Iraqis, was confident that the remnants of the Republican Guard were being annihilated.²²⁷ Powell agreed; and when President Bush asked him if it was time to stop, the chairman called Schwarzkopf on the direct line. Schwarzkopf had just finished

²²⁵ Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: United States Army in the Gulf War* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Staff United States Army, 1993), 369.

²²⁶ Gordon and Trainor support Horner on the issue. See the FSCL controversy in, *The General's War*, 411-13.

²²⁷ Ibid., 414.

giving the “mother of all briefings” at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Riyadh, where he told the media, “We almost completely destroyed the offensive capability of the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait theater of operations. The gates are closed.”²²⁸ The only problem was that the gate was far from closed because the Iraqis were still streaming north across the Euphrates via a bridge north of Basra and the Hawr al Hammar bridge west of the city.²²⁹ The coalition was about to stop a bridge too near.

To his credit, Schwarzkopf asked Powell for time to consult with his commanders before he recommended a cease-fire, but he stated, “I don’t have any problem with it. Our objective was the destruction of the enemy forces, and for all intents and purposes we’ve accomplished that objective.”²³⁰ Schwarzkopf then called Yeosock, Horner, and Boomer and asked them if they had any reservations about a 0500 cease-fire the next morning. Yeosock then told Franks and Luck that a cease-fire was imminent and asked them how long it would take to disengage from the enemy. According to Gordon and Trainor, Yeosock was not looking for inputs or advice on the wisdom of the decision. Evidence suggests that the front line commanders had serious reservations with the decision; but McCaffrey and others, in true Army fashion, saluted smartly.²³¹ Powell called Schwarzkopf at 0200 to inform him that President Bush, for public relations reasons, had extended the cease-fire from 0500 to 0800 to end the ground offensive at the one hundred-hour mark. The decision became finalized after Schwarzkopf informed Powell that the field commanders had concurred with the decision. After hearing the news, Schwarzkopf’s deputy Lieutenant General Cal Waller said, “You’ve got to be shitting me. Why a cease-fire now?” Schwarzkopf responded, “One hundred hours has a nice ring.” Waller proclaimed, “That’s bullshit,” and Schwarzkopf told him, “Then you go argue with them.”²³² Waller was not about to do that; and like the rest of the commanders, he saluted smartly.

²²⁸ Ibid., 417.

²²⁹ Ibid., 418.

²³⁰ Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 470.

²³¹ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 425.

²³² Ibid., 423.

Consequences of Lack of Resolution

Several consequences evolved as a direct result of leaving the gate open for the retreating Iraqi Army. First, American surveillance photos taken on 1 March showed that 842 tanks, 1,412 armored personnel carriers, 70% of the Hammurabi Republican Guard Division, and several elements of the Tawakalna and Medina Republican Guard Divisions had escaped. It is interesting to note that 365 of the 842 tanks belonged to the Republican Guard, and only one senior officer from the Republican Guard was captured.²³³ As soon as the news of the cease-fire spread north, many Iraqi soldiers, Shiites, and Kurds throughout Iraq attempted to overthrow Hussein's regime. Schwarzkopf, however, at the Safwan negotiations had agreed to allow the Iraqis to fly helicopter sorties over Iraq.²³⁴ Saddam Hussein quickly took advantage of Schwarzkopf's error. Armed with twenty untouched divisions, a weakened but intact Republican Guard force, and armed helicopters, Hussein concentrated firepower against his would-be successors. In an apparent gesture to save face for Schwarzkopf, Bush refused to change the helicopter policy, which forced coalition pilots to watch helplessly as Iraqi helicopters attacked the Shiites and Kurds.

Scowcroft blamed the inaction on "geopolitics." Powell argued that stopping the helicopter flights would not stop the fighting and that additional military action would prolong United States involvement. The White House press secretary told the media that Arab allies opposed military intervention; but in reality, the Saudis requested that the United States arm the Shiites; and Turkish President Turquz Ozal supported the direct overthrow of Saddam Hussein.²³⁵ The United States eventually set up no-fly zones in Northern and Southern Iraq to protect the Shiites and Kurds; but not only were these actions too late, Operation Southern and Northern Watch have kept the United States involved militarily longer than the Vietnam War. Despite ten years of economic sanctions and several punitive strikes, Saddam Hussein continues to hold a firm grip on Iraq and continues to stir trouble in the region.

²³³ Ibid., 429.

²³⁴ See information on the Safwan negotiations in Gordon and Trainor's, *The General's War*, 440-48.

²³⁵ Ibid., 456.

These speculations assume that the destruction of the Republican Guard would have prevented Saddam from filling the post-Desert Storm power vacuum. President Bush stated after the war

While we would have preferred to reduce further the threat Saddam posed to the region—and help undermine his hold on power—by destroying additional Guard divisions, in truth he didn't need those forces which escaped destruction in order to maintain internal control. . . . One more day would not have altered the strategic situation, but it would have made a substantial difference in human terms. We would have been castigated for slaughtering fleeing soldiers after our own mission was successfully completed.²³⁶

Brent Scowcroft recalled that “The tactical situation was changing rapidly, and we did not have a clear picture of exactly what was happening on the ground. . . . What we did not know was that the plan to trap the Republican Guard in Kuwait was not working.”²³⁷ Would it have mattered? Powell cannot be held responsible for the decision to end the war, but evidence suggests that his rush to cease hostilities as quickly as possible to avoid another long, drawn-out Vietnam influenced Bush’s decision to leave the Shiites and Kurds to their own devices. It is impossible to determine if the Shiites and Kurds would have been able to overthrow Saddam without having to fight the remnants of the Republican Guard and the incessant helicopter attacks, but it certainly would have made their job easier. Nevertheless, if the military had done its job, there would be no question. It is ironic that as Secretary of State, ten years later, Colin Powell had to deal with many of the issues he sought to avoid during the closing hours of Desert Storm.

Underlying Reasons for Lack of Resolution

There are many reasons the gate was not shut during the closing hours of Operation Desert Storm, but almost all can be traced to a flawed campaign design—especially after the battle of Khafji—and an inappropriate command and control system. The argument could be made that the National Command Authority (NCA) placed too much pressure on Schwarzkopf to end the war before the Republican Guard had been

²³⁶ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 488.

²³⁷ Ibid., 484.

destroyed. Bush, Powell, and others may have been overly concerned about the impact that additional “highways of death” might have on America’s global prestige; but the failure of the military to anticipate, and plan for, a demoralized and ineffective Iraqi Army forced the politicians to react. To their credit, however, the leaders in Washington always deferred to General Schwarzkopf before they made any decision that might affect the battlefield—it was his war to win or lose. Schwarzkopf, to his credit, called each of his commanders with an open mind before he agreed with Washington’s plan for a 28 February cease-fire. Evidence suggests that the Army commanders on the battlefield had serious reservations about the cease-fire, but they did not object to Yeosock’s instructions. Not one commander argued for an extension at the critical hour.

Some have argued that General Franks should have been fired for his slow pace. There are two sides to the story; but perhaps if he had moved more quickly, the number of tanks and armored personnel carriers that reached the Euphrates would have been significantly reduced. Franks had many forces to coordinate in a small area of operations and in many cases had to contend with bad weather, but VII Corps’s late arrival did not help fix Schwarzkopf’s bind until it was almost too late. Gordon and Trainor held no punches when rendering their verdict that Schwarzkopf should have replaced Yeosock with Waller after Yeosock was forced to leave the theater in mid-February for emergency gall bladder surgery.²³⁸ According to Gordon and Trainor, “Yeosock had done a solid job overseeing the Army buildup in Saudi Arabia. Though a competent staff officer, he was not cut out to command two corps. Almost everyone in CENTCOM and the Army knew it. . . . He lived in fear of Schwarzkopf’s temper.”²³⁹ On the other hand, others have described Yeosock as “A necessary calming and introspective counterpart to his emotional and extroverted boss. . . [who] possessed a keen intellect and a prodigious capacity for work.”²⁴⁰

These are all valid points, but the underlying responsibility for failing to destroy the Republican Guard rests with the theater commander. Schwarzkopf deserves credit for providing the leadership behind the successful completion of the first two coalition

²³⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 431.

²³⁹ Ibid., 300-01.

²⁴⁰ Scales, *Certain Victory*, 46.

objectives; and although a distinguished and brave soldier, he also deserves the blame for a flawed military strategy and a defective command and control structure. Powell told the Senate Armed Services Committee on 3 December, “One can hunker down, one can dig in, one can disperse to try to ride out a single-dimension attack. Such strategies are designed to hope to win, they are not designed to win.”²⁴¹ Coalition ground forces exposed the entrenched enemy forces that had survived the repeated aerial assaults during the previous five weeks. Schwarzkopf, however, missed an excellent opportunity during the critical opening stages of the ground war to integrate air and land fires to annihilate the enemy.

Most astute students of military history, and certainly Schwarzkopf and the graduates of the Army’s School of Advanced Military Studies he recruited to plan the ground campaign,²⁴² knew that the modified Schlieffen Plan of World War I failed because the pinning force opposite the pivot point had become too strong. Without question, Schwarzkopf and his planners should have anticipated after Khafji that two Marine divisions “let loose” a day before the main attack would put the Iraqis on the run. They should have realized that envelopment is ineffective against retreating forces unless their escape route can be severed. As theater commander, Schwarzkopf should have known that the most efficient means of destroying a retreating force, as demonstrated during the German retreat at the Battle of the Falaise Gap²⁴³ or the North Korean retreat after the Allied breakout of the Pusan Perimeter,²⁴⁴ is via airpower. Instead of using airpower to “prepare the battlefield” for five weeks and then allowing Horner to provide cleanup close air support sorties within a convoluted and confrontational FSCL framework, Schwarzkopf should have integrated airpower into the plan as the “vertical hook.” Schwarzkopf knew that it would take days for armored vehicles to land the knockout punch during their two-to-three-hundred-mile trek across the desert; but as the

²⁴¹ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 179.

²⁴² See the story of the Jedi Knights throughout Gordon and Trainor’s, *The General’s War*.

²⁴³ See the account of the Battle of the Falaise Gap in John Keegan’s, *The Second World War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 396-414. According to Keegan, on page 410, “Constant air attack into the clogged roads and fields of the pocket had left it choked with burnt and broken tanks, trucks, and artillery pieces.”

²⁴⁴ See the account of airpower’s role during the breakout of the Pusan Perimeter in Robert Frank Futrell’s, *The United States Air Force in Korea: 1950-1953* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 168-175.

CINC, he should have known that it would take only minutes for airpower to cover the same distance and focus devastating force on a retreating enemy. Unfortunately, the words “joint” and “integrated” meant two different things to the senior military leaders in theater and in Washington.

McCaffrey argued after the war that the XVIII (Abn) Corps attack should have been launched two days before everyone else and that the Marines should have been limited to skirmishes until the left hook was well under way.²⁴⁵ Perhaps a better option, based on the lessons of Khafji, would have been to utilize one coalition army corps to put the Iraqis on the run and simultaneously allow airpower to help protect the Army’s flank and destroy the retreating Army before they crossed the Euphrates. Schwarzkopf’s inflexibility and lack of foresight were not intentional, and he tried to adjust later. But the fact remains that his operational design was defective and caused the senior political and military leaders inside the Beltway to push for a quick end to hostilities before the coalition lost face in the eyes of the world.

As Commander in Chief and a former aviator, President Bush takes some responsibility for not recognizing the airpower void in the ground campaign plan. Although he left the conduct of the war to the generals, perhaps Bush should have at least asked the question, “Why is airpower essentially missing from the plan?” Perhaps Bush, as a former navy fighter pilot, should have recognized the effect airpower could have on a retreating army—especially in the desert. Perhaps the Commander in Chief should not have been surprised at airpower’s results at Mutlah ridge, and perhaps he should have conditioned the public for more “highways of death” if he truly wanted the Republican Guard destroyed.

In addition to a flawed ground strategy, Schwarzkopf was responsible for creating a command structure that ultimately put him out of touch with the battlefield when it counted most. Schwarzkopf had designated himself the Joint Force Land Component Commander in charge of all American and other Western ground forces in an attempt to maintain unity of command. Robert Scales believes the arrangement was “rather

²⁴⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 432.

convoluted and went against the principles of simplicity and unity of command,”²⁴⁶ and Powell was concerned that Schwarzkopf was spending too much time planning the land offensive and repeatedly suggested that he get “someone between you and Yeosock.”²⁴⁷ Schwarzkopf did not like the idea, but told Waller, “Powell is Marshall. I am Eisenhower. Where is my Bradley?”²⁴⁸

Some have argued that Schwarzkopf made the decision to assure ascendancy over Saudi prince, Lieutenant General Khalid bin Sultan, who shared responsibility for the coalition with CENTCOM and who was his political equal. Others have argued that Schwarzkopf wanted to avoid creating another staff layer and headquarters within CENTCOM because adding another middleman between his corps commanders and himself would only make matters worse.²⁴⁹ Gordon and Trainor suggest that Schwarzkopf became the JFLCC because he had little faith in Yeosock; and by being the JFLCC, he was well within his rights to bypass ARCENT and go direct to the corps commanders with instructions. According to Gordon and Trainor

It was Yeosock’s responsibility to keep the two corps in harness and driving forward, but he was reluctant to assert his role as commander of Army ground forces and was thoroughly intimidated by [Schwarzkopf]. In dodging his responsibilities, he frustrated Schwarzkopf, who felt compelled to deal directly with the corps commanders. Schwarzkopf’s jumping in and out did nobody any good and confused command relations during the offensive.²⁵⁰

This created numerous problems for ARCENT. Schwarzkopf could go directly to his corps commanders, but they were obliged to go through Yeosock, who in turn, had to compete with the Marines, British, French, and Arab command for the Commander in Chief’s (CINC’s) time. If it sounds complicated, in reality, it was far worse.

Targeting issues, before and after G-Day, became a significant source of friction due to Schwarzkopf’s decision to be the JFLCC. During the initial days of Desert Storm, ARCENT could only hope that Horner passed on the battlefield coordination element’s

²⁴⁶ Scales, *Certain Victory*, 141. For additional information see Damian J. McCarthy and Susan A. Medlin’s article entitled, “Two Hats for the Joint Force Commander?” *Joint Forces Quarterly* Summer 2000, 91-98.

²⁴⁷ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 300.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 300. Schwarzkopf was unaware that General Omar Bradley was not a theater ground commander because Eisenhower purposefully avoided appointing one.

²⁴⁹ Scales, *Certain Victory*, 140-41.

²⁵⁰ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 430-31.

(BCE) inputs to the CINC. When it appeared that this was not the case, ARCENT's BCE chief, Colonel David Schulte, asked Waller to discuss the issue with the CINC. Schwarzkopf agreed to let Waller chair the newly formed Joint Targeting Board ten days after the beginning of the air campaign.²⁵¹ The system worked before G-day because only incidental coordination was required between air and ground elements; however, once the ground war began, detailed and timely coordination was required. The new system was unable to manage a fast-paced campaign—especially the FSCL crisis or the fluid and dynamic situation south of Basra during the closing hours of Desert Storm. Perhaps Schwarzkopf should have directed Horner to establish command relationships between elements subordinate to the JFACC but in direct support of both VII and XVIII (Abn) Corps. Perhaps Horner could have assigned an A-10 wing commander to integrate his forces directly with Franks and Luck before and after the ground war began.

Yeosock may have roomed with Horner, but he had no authority and little influence on airpower integration when his corps commanders needed it most. The situation was a far cry from the days of World War II when men like Third Army commander, Lieutenant General George S. Patton, could turn to XIX TAC commander Major General Otto P. Weyland to provide close air support for his advancing army. Although faced with a different context, Desert Storm corps commanders were obliged to talk to Yeosock if they had a FSCL problem or a requirement for close air support. Yeosock, however, unlike Patton, had no authority to grant their requests.

Perhaps Schwarzkopf should have sent Yeosock to the front lines with his corps commanders—assuming Yeosock's health was not a factor. Yeosock may have not have been a McCaffrey, but it is highly probable that he would have had more situational awareness of the battlefield and may have requested more time—if only he had been closer to the action. If Schwarzkopf did not trust Yeosock to lead his corps commanders, he should have fired him. If he held Yeosock back for health concerns, he should have replaced him with Waller. Better yet, perhaps Schwarzkopf should have removed Third Army from the operational chain of command and placed Yeosock in administrative command of VII and XVIII (Abn) Corps, where he excelled. Joint Publication 0-2,

²⁵¹ Scales, *Certain Victory*, 180-81.

Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), states that “joint force commanders have the authority to best accomplish the assigned mission based on their concept of operations.”²⁵² By removing Yeosock formally from the operational chain of command, Schwarzkopf would have called Franks and Luck on the evening of 27 February—instead of Yeosock who was with him in Riyadh. Schwarzkopf had called Franks and Luck on several occasions, but never were those calls more needed than on the evening before the cease-fire was directed. Perhaps the conversation would have been different, and perhaps Luck and Franks would have asked for more time.

When it came time to make the tough call concerning the cease-fire, Schwarzkopf and Yeosock were both too far removed from and out of touch with the action on the battlefield. As Gordon and Trainor so eloquently state, “Even with limited intelligence and the veritable “fog of war,” the war looked different in the Euphrates valley than it did at the White House (or Lucky Main for that matter). The closer one got to the battlefield, the more questionable the decision to end the war seemed.”²⁵³

Conclusion

Surprisingly, Colin Powell told the President immediately after the Gulf War, “This is historic and there’s been nothing like this in history.”²⁵⁴ Powell may have been comparing the apparent glorious victory of Desert Storm with the debacle of Vietnam. Perhaps he was carried away in the moment, but he might not have made the statement a week later when he saw what the “remnants” of the Republican Guard were able to do to the Shiites. Perhaps he would now agree that the closing hours of Desert Storm resembled the closing hours of the Confederate retreat at Gettysburg in 1863 or the German retreat from Sicily in 1943—two examples of battles after which armies were allowed to escape but resurfaced later to inflict additional casualties. Deputies Chairman Bob Gates further added to the excitement of the moment when he told the President, “One thing historic is we stopped. We crushed their forty-three divisions, but we

²⁵² Joint Publication 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)*, February 1995, xiv.

²⁵³ Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 425.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 487.

stopped—we didn't want to just kill, and history will look on that kindly.”²⁵⁵ Gates may have been correct, but President Bush knew better. On 28 February, the President stated, “Still no feeling of euphoria. I think I know why it is. After my speech last night, Baghdad radio started broadcasting that we've been forced to capitulate. . . . Obviously when the troops straggle home with no armor, beaten up, 50,000 casualties and maybe more dead, the people of Iraq will know.”²⁵⁶ The President, however, was unaware that thousands of troops rode out of Kuwait in their tanks and armored personnel carriers; and he was perhaps naïve in thinking that Saddam would lose power. The Republican Guard was beaten up, but it had sufficient strength remaining to crush the Shiite and Kurd uprisings and help Saddam Hussein retain control of the country.

It was up to the military to close the gate on the Republican Guard; but Schwarzkopf's flawed campaign design put the Iraqis on the run before his “left hook” could land its knockout punch. Airpower could have provided the “vertical hook,” but Schwarzkopf may have missed the opportunity because the Army wanted its moment in the spotlight. Despite being more air-minded than most Army generals wanted him to be, perhaps Schwarzkopf was nonetheless entrenched in “Army think”—something a CINC cannot afford to do. There was still a chance to stop thousands of Iraqi troops and vehicles from crossing the Euphrates, but Schwarzkopf and Yeosock let them escape without saying a word because they were too far removed from the front lines to understand the true nature of the conflict—and no one on the battlefield significantly protested the decision. If Bush, Cheney, Powell, Schwarzkopf, or Yeosock had been in McCaffrey or Peay's shoes, perhaps they would have made a different decision, but they were not. Schwarzkopf's failure to destroy the Republican Guard set the stage for future instability in the Gulf region. The global and domestic legs of the stool were solid. The theater-military leg, on the other hand, may have been strong enough to allow slight pressure at first; but in the end, it cracked—causing a portion of the long-term strategy to crumble and continue to haunt us today.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 487.

²⁵⁶ Bush, *All the Best*, 514.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to answer the following question: When attempting to formulate a balanced strategy, what is required of senior military and political leaders to reconcile differences and reduce tensions among the global, domestic, and theater-military domains? Answering this question is important because if senior political and military leaders, who are responsible for creating the nation's strategy during times of conflict, fail to transcend their own spheres of control and influence, they may not get a second chance to get it right. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how successful the senior political and military leaders in each case study were at achieving a balanced strategy, determine the most significant contributing factors that promoted or inhibited fusion of the three domains, synthesize the results, and address future implications.

Determining Success

When confronted with the Gymnast/Sledgehammer decision, President Franklin Roosevelt successfully balanced the global imperative to keep the Alliance united and the domestic imperative to boost national morale and attempt to gain democratic seats in the 1942 congressional elections with the most viable military strategy. Roosevelt may have lost temporary credibility with Stalin for essentially going back on his word, he may have had to mend relations with General Marshall, and he may have lost seats in Congress; but his decision to support Operation Torch kept the Alliance on track and paved the way for eventual victory over the Axis Powers.

When confronted with the decision whether on not to begin a land war in Asia, President Johnson attempted to balance the global imperative of halting the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and the domestic imperative of securing legislation for his Great Society with a flawed theater-military strategy. Johnson's decision to approve Westmoreland's request to conduct offensive search and destroy operations demonstrates his willingness to try anything to

keep from losing in Vietnam. This may explain his actions, but it does not justify them. Evidence suggests that, although adequately warned, Johnson threw American lives, money, and prestige at a known sunk cost.

When confronted with the decision to end the Persian Gulf War, President Bush assumed that the military had achieved the three coalition goals outlined in United Nations Resolution 678. Although domestic support was strong at the time and not a significant factor in the decision, the President believed the global imperatives of ensuring stability within the Gulf region and emerging from its first test as the world's only superpower with its global prestige intact had been enabled by the military's destruction of the Republican Guard. Although successful with the first two coalition objectives, Schwarzkopf's flawed campaign design created the conditions that allowed thousands of Republican Guard troops and a significant portion of its armor to leave Kuwait unscathed. The CINC also created an inefficient command and control system that prevented senior decision-makers in Riyadh and Washington from knowing the true nature of the battlefield when they made their decision to enact a cease-fire.

Significant Contributing Factors

The most significant contributing factor in the decision to implement Operation Torch that promoted the fusion of all three domains was President Roosevelt's ability to stay focused on the global task at hand and still tend to the dynamic and complex imperatives of the other two domains and the effect they might have on the Alliance. The dilemma Roosevelt confronted during the Torch decision revolved around a naval problem—not having enough landing craft to make Sledgehammer a viable option in 1942. It may have been chance at work, but Roosevelt and Churchill had the naval background and expertise to understand Lord Mountbatten's argument. Roosevelt, Churchill, and the British Chiefs of Staff recognized that Sledgehammer had no chance for success and that Bolero would delay operations against the Axis for too long. Roosevelt and Churchill were confident and skilled politicians, had significant experience in military affairs, and possessed the judgment and intellect required to undertake the responsibilities associated with leading the Alliance against the Axis Powers.

The most significant contributing factor in Johnson's decision to begin a ground war in Asia that inhibited the fusion of all three domains was his inability to transcend the domestic

domain. Thirty-two years of public office had made Johnson comfortable in his domestic sphere of control and influence, but he was insecure and unconfident in his abilities to manage complex global and military affairs in a third-world nation. Johnson inherited his predecessors' anti-communist policies, but he chose to support them at all costs because he was uncomfortable with handling world affairs in his own manner. The dilemma Johnson confronted during the decision to begin a land war in Asia revolved around a counterinsurgency problem. It may have been chance at work again, but all hopes of attempting to deal effectively against the Vietcong died on 22 November 1963. The poor quality of military advice from Westmoreland had made matters worse; and because Johnson did not have the military background and expertise to know any better, he backed a flawed military strategy and then created additional problems with his paranoid, controlling, and manipulative behavior.

The most significant contributing factor during Bush's decision to enact a cease-fire that inhibited the fusion of all three domains was a theater commander who refused to adjust a flawed military campaign plan and an inefficient command and control system. Although chance may have placed a former aviator as the Commander in Chief, the President allowed his theater commander to develop a campaign plan that emphasized land forces and underplayed the potentially lethal effects of airpower on a retreating enemy. For some reason, Bush was shocked at the results airpower delivered against the Iraqi Army on the "highway of death." The President made the decision to trust his theater commander to accomplish all three coalition objectives; and although Schwarzkopf might have thought he had "closed the gate," he was responsible for setting the conditions that left senior decision makers out of touch with the battlefield.

Synthesis

Given all three case studies, the historical evidence suggests that people and ideas matter. This may sound like a statement of the obvious; but the research indicates that formulating strategy requires hard thinking, careful insight, and an above-average intellect. Clausewitz was correct—genius prevails. Roosevelt, Churchill, Lord Mountbatten, and Sir Alan Brooke had it; Johnson, Westmoreland, and Schwarzkopf did not. Bush may have had it, but he trusted others who did not. Sun Tzu was also correct—know your enemy and yourself. Roosevelt was

confident in his abilities and able to understand the nature of the war at hand; Johnson was not. Bush may have been, but perhaps he should have provided more guidance to his CINC—before and after the war. Schwarzkopf failed to make the necessary adjustments to his strategy—even after the enemy had shown his hand earlier at the battle of Khafji—and then made a questionable decision to keep Third Army in the operational chain of command.

To be fair to the people involved, situations also matter; and these three cases studied here span the gamut of “strategic difficulty,” particularly regarding the critical theater-military strategy. Historians and analysts two generations removed from the Vietnam conflict have had difficulty fabricating a winning theater-military strategy. Vietnam, as some analysts expressed during the conflict, was a “loser.” World War II, in retrospect, presented winning and losing options to Allied strategists. In the Gulf War, given the terrain and balance of forces, it is hard to conceive of a strategy that would not have worked in terms of defeating Iraqi forces. The magnitude of victory was, however, dependent on the prudence and decisiveness of the leaders.

Implications

The evidence suggests that future senior political and military leaders should be selected for higher command based on their intellect, confidence, and ability to transcend their own spheres of control and influence. Senior political and military leaders must set priorities, determine objectives, and develop strategies that carefully balance all three domains. Friction within and among all three domains is inevitable but must be resolved. Evidence also suggests that a flawed theater-military strategy—Marshall’s proposed Sledgehammer/Bolero, Westmoreland’s search and destroy, Schwarzkopf’s mirror-imaged Schlieffen Plan—makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve global and domestic imperatives. In the Vietnam and Desert Storm cases, a flawed theater-military strategy could not be rectified.

This suggests that future CINCs must be selected carefully for their ability to recognize the unique characteristics that each medium of warfare brings to the strategic table. It is necessary for a CINC to understand what his service brings to the fight, but it is not sufficient to achieve victory. The evidence also suggests that future Commanders in Chief should have the military background and expertise to recognize and speak out against a flawed campaign design and be prepared to counter aggressively any negative media coverage that conflicts with

overarching military and political goals. This study does not claim to have developed a new formula or prescription for making better strategy, because human behavior and war are too dynamic and unpredictable to warrant concrete principles. This study does, however, borrow from some of the mistakes and triumphs from our nation's past to provide useful insights that may assist national and military leaders develop better strategy in the future.

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